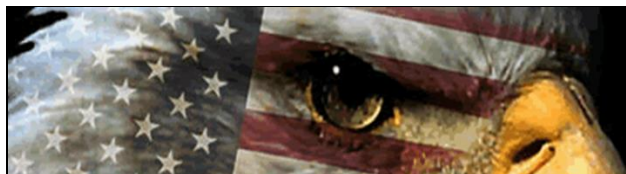



<div>  <div> Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS WEDNESDAY — 31 AUG 2022 </div>  </div>			
	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	08/31 Day 189 of the Russia invasion 08/31 Ukraine successes in south offensive 08/31 Russians in Germany feel war backlash 08/31 Taiwan vows self-defense, counterattack 08/31 Mass exodus: Australia faces loss 600,000 08/30 Russia proxy leader flees Ukraine? 08/30 Putin eyes undoing Gorbachev legacy 08/30 Last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev dies 08/30 Ukraine claims counteroffensive in south 08/30 Ukraine frontline units trade tanks, artillery 08/30 Europe braces for Russia gas disruption 08/30 Millions in new China Covid lockdown 08/30 Power shortage: China rations electricity 08/30 Taiwan fires warning shot at China drone 08/30 Solomon Is. halt foreign military ships visit 08/30 Africa Russian mercenaries target civilians 08/30 Iraq Shiite factions enter deadly new phase 08/30 Baghdad faces fighting, city grinds to a halt 08/30 Pakistan flooding: 1/3rd country underwater	08/30 Life expectancy plunged again 2021 08/30 Pandemic worsens for the vulnerable 08/30 Covid Chicago schools triple from last year 08/30 Texas person diagnosed w/monkeypox dies 08/30 Job openings rose, hiring accelerated 08/30 Satellites track illegal fishing, logging 08/30 Freight rail crisis; supply chain chaos 08/30 Fed official: 'few years' inflation back to 2% 08/30 Jackson mayor: water crisis to cost billions 08/30 Canada invokes treaty: keep pipeline open 08/30 Navy intervenes: Iran seizes US sea drone 08/30 Army grounds fleet of Chinook helicopters 08/29 National Cinema Day: \$3 tickets on Sep 3rd	08/30 King Co. scrambles over monkeypox 08/30 KCRHA wants \$90M more for homeless 08/30 Seattle teachers union eyes strike vote 08/30 SPD chief search entering 'final phases' 08/30 Seattle worker w/'racist beliefs' on payroll 08/30 Seattle-area home prices cool off, decline 08/30 Seattle ties record most 90-deg. days/year 08/30 Lake Chelan fire areas in evacuation order 08/30 NICC Oregon fire threatens 7,000 structures 08/30 Labor Day weekend traffic is coming 08/30 Jayapal benefits by extra police security 08/29 Seattle firefighter logs 130hrs OT in a week
Cyber, Tech Awareness Go to articles	08/31 Saudis jail woman 45yrs: social media use 08/30 IT Army of Ukraine: digital resistance 08/30 TA423 targets firms in South China Sea 08/30 Crypto miner hides in fake translate apps 08/30 'Agenda' ransomware customized attacks 08/30 Hackers use ModernLoader; infect systems	08/31 Study: blue light screens accelerate aging 08/30 Phishing campaign targets PyPI users 08/30 Alert: Evil Corp threatens health sector 08/30 Chrome extensions steal browsing data 08/30 Calif. sweeping online child safety code 08/30 FBI, Kentucky probe \$4M cybercrime theft 08/30 Classified threat briefings industry sectors 08/30 Malware hidden in Webb telescope images 08/30 Ready? Mass video deepfakes are coming	
Terrorism, Extremism Go to articles	08/31 Taliban celebrate year in power 08/30 Canada spy trafficked people for IS? 08/30 Afghan rebel groups wage war Taliban rule 08/30 Pandemic impact on extremists use of IEDs	08/30 Inside shadow evacuation of Kabul 08/30 Afghans as security risks not fully vetted?	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	08/31 WMO: rare 'triple-dip' La Nina in 2022 08/30 Violent, lawless erasure of the Amazon 08/30 Wuhan lab detects brand new virus in mice	08/30 More smoke marijuana than cigarettes	08/30 Pilot in plane 'flips off' Whatcom Co.
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	08/31 Mexico criminal cartels expand reach 08/30 Fentanyl: 2 Mexico cartels dominate supply	08/30 Arrest in shooting 3 Dutch soldiers	08/30 'Rainbow fentanyl' in Pacific Northwest 08/30 Separate child kidnap attempts in Seattle 08/30 Seattle shooting part of 'concerning trend' 08/30 Jewelry thieves target elderly western WA 08/30 Ex-Spokane cop guilty rapes while on duty 08/30 Leader drug trafficking gang pleads guilty 08/30 Oregon store shooter shared plans online 08/30 Oregon Safeway worker hid, fought gunman

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 Russians in Germany feel war backlash
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-08-31/germany-backlash-against-russians-ukraine-war
GIST	BERLIN — Ilja Kaplan left his hometown of Moscow as a young man 32 years ago for a new life in Berlin and never went back. Yet he never let go of his Russian identity and opened a Russian restaurant called Pasternak — a place where Germans, Ukrainians, Russians and many others have been merrily eating, drinking and also working for a quarter-century.

But that immigrant success story was suddenly under threat after Moscow ordered its forces to invade Ukraine in February, which triggered a wave of Russophobia here in a land with one of the world's biggest Russian diaspora communities. Not only did many Germans, shocked by the unprovoked attack, feel a need to "do their part" by boycotting Pasternak and other Russian businesses, but also Kaplan started receiving warnings that his ["Dr. Zhivago"-themed restaurant](#) would be firebombed and that Ukrainian thugs were on their way to rough up his cooks and waiters.

The situation felt surreal given that Kaplan had publicly condemned Russia's war on its neighbor and that most of his restaurant's employees are Ukrainian. Only a handful are Russian.

"I can't really show you what it looks like in my soul, but it hurts," said Kaplan, a friendly 60-year-old with white hair and sad eyes. "We were always apolitical, and we're totally against this war. But I'm Russian and [Russia started this war](#) and now we're facing this hostility — and our business is suffering. Why? I understand people are upset. But what did we have to do with Putin and this war?"

Kaplan and many of the estimated 3 million people with Russian passports or roots living in Germany have been feeling the backlash to Russian President Vladimir Putin's 7-month-old attack on Ukraine. They report being ostracized, discriminated against and taunted even when they try to make clear that they oppose the war.

At the same time, they acknowledge tensions within their own community, which includes a considerable number of immigrants who [consume Russia's state-dominated media and support Putin](#). In early April, about 900 supporters of the Russian leader held a widely criticized car rally through the center of Berlin, waving giant Russian flags and beeping their horns.

That same month, the Federal Criminal Police Office reported that more than 1,700 crimes, including 162 acts of violence, had been committed in Germany against Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians "in connection with the war" during the conflict's first two months. The crimes ranged from insults and threats to physical assaults and property damage.

Business at Pasternak, in the trendy Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauerberg, has fallen by 30% since the war started — even after Kaplan tweaked the menu to turn dishes such as the "Fruehstueck Moskau" (Moscow Breakfast) into simply "Fruehstueck." His dream of doubling the number of restaurants he owns, from eight to 16, with one in each of Berlin's districts, now seems hopeless.

"It feels like all the work of the last 30 years has been destroyed," Kaplan said. "We survived the corona pandemic and I had a future. Now it feels like I've got no future."

Germany's Russian diaspora comprises the ethnic Germans whose families immigrated to Russia starting in the 18th century and returned in the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, along with large numbers of ethnic Russian and Jewish immigrants from Russia who [began settling here during the late 1980s](#). Many of the more recent immigrants have tried to retain remnants of their culture and especially language while integrating more or less successfully into Germany's powerhouse economy and way of life.

The war in Ukraine and the attendant backlash in Germany, as well as in other parts of Europe, brought to an abrupt end a brief but happy era of good relations between Germans and those in their midst with Russian roots — and between the two biggest countries in Europe, in spite of a turbulent mutual history marred by wars and upheaval.

Successive post-Cold War German governments embraced "Wandel durch Handel" (change through trade), the notion that there would never again be war on the continent if Russia could be inextricably lashed to Western Europe's economies. German chancellors past and present, who made their country [heavily dependent on Russian fossil fuels](#) in the process, now admit they got it wrong and were terribly naïve.

German anger over Ukraine is such that Larissa Shevikova, 82, who has lived in Berlin since moving to Communist East Germany in 1981 from her hometown of [Leningrad, now St. Petersburg](#), said she is even being spurned by local doctors when she tries to get appointments.

“There’s fear among my Russian friends,” said Shevikova, who added that a friend had been recently beaten up for speaking Russian to her mother and ended up in a hospital emergency room. “When we meet in public, we now try to speak [Russian] quietly. ... I used to have friendly conversations on the street with a neighbor who is a police officer when he was walking his dog. Now when I try to talk with him, he just says, ‘Nein, Nein,’ and walks away.”

The animosity can extend even to the playground.

“I was speaking Russian with my two daughters when two teenage boys came over and asked what language we were talking,” said Alevtina Enders, 37, who remains unabashedly proud of her family’s Russian traditions three decades after her parents moved to Germany. When she said she and her girls were speaking Russian, the youths shouted obscenities at them.

Calls by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European Union countries such as Estonia, Denmark and Poland for the EU to ban visas for Russian tourists have sent a further chill through the Russian diaspora because many worry it could cut them off from their families even more. The EU already [banned flights from Russia](#) earlier this year.

A moratorium on visas could slam shut the exit door for political dissidents and anyone fleeing Putin’s autocratic rule after tens of thousands of Russians fled in the first months of the war.

EU foreign ministers are scheduled to discuss the proposal during meetings this week, but a bloc-wide ban is unlikely [because of opposition from Germany](#) — in part because many Germans, including former Chancellor Willy Brandt, survived the Nazi era thanks to asylum in Sweden and other safe havens. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has already spoken out against any EU-wide ban, even though Baltic-area nations such as Estonia and Finland have started blocking or severely limiting the number of entering Russians.

More likely to be approved than an outright prohibition are measures to make the visa process more difficult and cumbersome for Russians.

“Traveling to and from Russia is definitely hard enough already, and a travel ban from the EU would make it more dangerous for Russians — they would feel more stuck in the country, and that’s not a good thing,” said Asya Chavdar, a 32-year-old Russian living in Berlin.

Chavdar got married last week to Dennis Harris, an American from Simi Valley who is working remotely from the German capital for his Boston-based company. Harris, 37, was able to fly his family in directly from California for the wedding, whereas Chavdar’s parents had to make a [circuitous car journey to Lithuania](#) before they could board a flight to Berlin.

Chavdar, who has lived in Berlin since 2017, said that she has not experienced any direct hostility from Germans at work or on the streets but that some friends haven’t been as fortunate.

“The climate has definitely changed,” she said, noting that her application for a tourist visa to travel on a honeymoon to the United States with her new husband had been denied. “I’m just hoping the world will change and will be a better place soon.”

Andrej Hermlin, a Berlin musician, has kept a Russian number called “Ochi Chernye” (“Dark Eyes”) in his swing dance band’s repertoire despite the rising anti-Russian sentiment.

“We were playing the song a few weeks ago, and there was an elderly German woman sitting in the front row waving a big thumbs-down against the song,” said Hermlin, who is proud of his Russian roots and language skills.

	<p>“After the show I asked her what was wrong, and she said it was unacceptable that we played Russian music. I told her about my mother and how she started learning German in 1943 in Moscow because she loved the language and wanted to read German literature,” Hermlin said.</p> <p>“I told her that if my mother could learn German during that war, then she ought to be able to listen to a Russian song now. She said she hadn’t thought of it that way.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/31 Ukraine successes in south offensive
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-southern-offensive-has-successes-three-areas-kherson-region-local-2022-08-31/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Aug 31 (Reuters) - Ukrainian forces have had "successes" in three areas of the Russian-occupied region of Kherson, a Ukrainian regional official said on Wednesday, two days after Kyiv announced the start of a southern counter-offensive to retake territory.</p> <p>Yuriy Sobolevskyi, the deputy head of Kherson's regional council, told Ukraine's national news broadcaster that Ukrainian troops had enjoyed successes in the Kherson, Beryslav, and Kakhovka districts, but declined to give details.</p> <p>"Now is the time to support our armed forces... Now is not the time to talk about the specific successes of our lads," he said, echoing the Ukrainian military's insistence on a near-total information blackout about the offensive.</p> <p>Sobolevskyi urged Ukrainians to support their armed forces with "everything they could" as the offensive was using up a vast quantity of resources.</p> <p>"Right now, drones and ammunition are being used there like expendable material," he said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/31 Taiwan vows self-defense, counterattack
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-military-continues-high-intensity-patrols-near-taiwan-taiwanese-defence-2022-08-31/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Aug 31 (Reuters) - Taiwan said on Wednesday it would exercise its right to self defence and counter-attack if Chinese armed forces entered its territory, as Beijing increased military activities near the democratic island.</p> <p>Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own against the strong objections of the government in Taipei, has held military exercises around the island this month in reaction to a visit to Taipei by U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi.</p> <p>Taiwanese defence officials said China's "high intensity" military patrols near Taiwan continued and Beijing's intention of making the Taiwan Strait separating the two sides its "inner sea" would become the main source of instability in the region.</p> <p>"For aircraft and ships that entered our sea and air territory of 12 nautical miles, the national army will exercise right to self-defence and counter-attack without exception," Lin Wen-Huang, deputy chief of the general staff for operations and planning, told reporters at a news briefing.</p> <p>Taiwan has complained of Chinese drones repeatedly flying close to its small groups of islands near China's coast.</p> <p>The military will exercise the same right to counter-attack Chinese drones that did not heed warnings to leave its territory after posing threats, Lin added.</p>

Taiwan fired warning shots at a Chinese drone for the first time on Tuesday shortly after President Tsai Ing-wen ordered Taiwan's military to take "strong countermeasures" against what she termed Chinese provocations.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, in a regular press briefing, reiterated China's position that Taiwan belonged to it.

"Firstly I need to tell you, Taiwan is a province of China, it has no so-called defence ministry. The Taiwan authorities are playing up their nervousness, this is meaningless," he said.

Earlier in the week, the ministry had dismissed complaints from Taiwan about drone harassment as "not worth fussing about".

In the same briefing, Ma Cheng-Kun, a director from military academy National Defence University, said China might further move to reject passage of foreign naval ships through the strait without its permission.

"After the new military normal status has been consolidated, then the risk of collision will increase if foreign naval ships insist on the rights of navigation and freedom," he said.

U.S. warships and those from allied nations such as Britain and Canada have routinely sailed through the strait in recent years, including two U.S. Navy warships last week.

Taiwan's armed forces are well-equipped but dwarfed by China's. Tsai is overseeing a modernisation programme and has made increasing defence spending a priority.

China has not ruled out using force to bring the island under its control. Taipei rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying that the People's Republic of China has never ruled the island and that only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Fed official: 'few years' inflation back to 2%
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/inflation-federal-reserve/2022/08/30/id/1085235/
GIST	<p>The Federal Reserve is committed to bringing soaring US inflation back down to 2%, but that will take "a few years," a top central banker said Tuesday.</p> <p>The Fed this year has moved aggressively to raise interest rates to try to rein in price surges that have hit American families, and central bankers, notably Fed chief Jerome Powell, have doused any hopes they would alter course anytime soon.</p> <p>New York Federal Reserve Bank President John Williams echoed Powell's tough comments, saying the benchmark lending rate will have to remain high for some time to bring demand back into line with supply.</p> <p>U.S. annual inflation ebbed slightly in July to a still-painfully high 8.5%, and Williams said the Fed is "absolutely committed" to achieving the 2% goal.</p> <p>"The situation is very challenging. Inflation is very high. The economy has a lot of crosscurrents. I do think it will take a few years, but we're going to get that done," Williams said in a discussion with The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>The Fed has increased the key lending rate four times this year, including two supersized 0.75 percentage point hikes in June and July, and Powell said Friday another similar increase is possible next month as well.</p>

	<p>Inflation was already high at the start of the year and spiked globally following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but gas prices at the pump have been moving down in recent weeks, taking some of the pressure off American consumers.</p> <p>That in turn led to a jump in consumer confidence in August, according to The Conference Board's monthly survey released Tuesday.</p> <p>But the U.S. labor market remains very strong, which the Fed fears will add fuel to the inflation fires as wages rise.</p> <p>New data from the Labor Department Tuesday showed that after dipping in June, job openings rebounded slightly in July, which means there are about two positions available for every unemployed person in the country.</p> <p>The Fed on Friday will get a look at one more employment report before its September 20-21 policy meeting, and will look for a slowdown after the surprise surge in July.</p> <p>Williams said the September policy decision will depend on the data, but added "it's clear that we need to get interest rates significantly higher by the end of the year."</p> <p>Inflation is "far too high. And that's really what we're focusing on."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 SPD chief search entering 'final phases'
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2022/08/with-administrations-spd-chief-search-entering-final-phases-report-leaks-harrells-comments-to-cops-about-homelessness-and-policing-in-seattle/
GIST	<p>As his effort to name a new leader for the Seattle Police Department enters its "final phases," Mayor Bruce Harrell is touting the strength of community input in the process even as his office faces a new mini scandal over the mayor's leaked off the cuff comments to department officers in recent meetings held to try to patch up the relationship between City Hall and its officers of the peace.</p> <p>Conservative media outlet KTTH reported on the leaked statements including conversations with officers in which Harrell "blasted" the city's approach to homelessness and said he is planning to back challengers targeting some members of the Seattle City Council.</p> <p>"You should know that when I ran for office, six council members of nine, six did not support me, and if that weren't bad enough, I didn't get the support of one colleague in a Democratic legislative district. If that weren't enough, Pramila Jayapal, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, AOC... they all loaded up and supported my opponent," Harrell reportedly told officers in one session reported by KTTH.</p> <p>The comments are much different than Harrell's "One Seattle" campaign the first-year mayor has positioned as a theme for a city coming together to recover from the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter and anti-police protests. The Central District-born Harrell defeated former City Council president Lorena González last year on a centrist platform that included a "reimagining" that would eradicate bad officers from SPD and change who is responding in cases where armed police aren't necessary and a homelessness plan that included increased resources for shelter and housing.</p> <p>The report on the leaks comes as the Harrell administration says its process to name a new SPD chief is entering the final stretch and touting community involvement in the process: <i>The City of Seattle held seven police chief community conversations and a public survey collected resident input on what matters most. Empower Initiative facilitated the first five community conversations in July and two supplemental sessions were held with community partners in August for additional feedback. Over more than three months, community members delivered additional public input through the City's Chief of Police Search survey.</i></p>

Across July community meetings, an estimated 47% of participants were Black, 33% were youth or young adults, and the Central District was the most represented neighborhood, the administration announced. But it's not clear what impact the community process will have on the selection process.

In May, Harrell [formed a 14-member search committee](#) to identify candidates to lead the department and launched a new "community survey" to identify "what priorities and qualities matter most to residents."

[CHS reported here on the search](#) including Mayor Harrell's championing of current Interim **Chief Adrian Diaz** to apply for the job. Diaz's run as interim chief began in 2020 after **Carmen Best's** [decision to resign](#) over what she said were frustrations with efforts to lay off police officers following criticism of her response to her handling of CHOP and the 2020 protests. Best said she could not be part of any layoffs. Then **Mayor Jenny Durkan** piled on, levying heavy criticism on the city council.

In [a report on 2021 community surveys regarding crime in the city](#), respondents in the **East Precinct** including Capitol Hill and the Central District continued to rate Seattle Police poorly and expressed some of the most cynical views in the city about the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the department.

The city charter requires the mayor's office to conduct a search and name three finalists. The final candidate must then be approved by the city council.

This week, the administration announced the committee will submit "the top three candidates as determined by the competitive examination" to the mayor "for his consideration" by September 8th: *These three finalists will engage in a series of stakeholder interviews, which will culminate in a candidate question and answer session on the evening of September 15. This session will be televised on the Seattle Channel, where candidates will be asked a series of questions submitted by community members. Questions for the candidate address can be submitted [here](#).*

The KTTH report, meanwhile, reveals there is more on Harrell's mind in regards to SPD than just a new leader. In the leaks, KTTH includes Harrell's insistence that Seattle should no longer be subject to [the federal consent decree slapped on SPD in 2018](#) after findings of bias and improper use of force and his hopes that a new contract can be nailed down with the **Seattle Police Officer Guild** union by the end of the year.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Seattle worker w/'racist beliefs' on payroll
SOURCE	https://www.knkn.org/social-justice/2022-08-30/seattle-employee-is-found-to-hold-racist-beliefs-then-city-pays-him-125k-in-settlement
GIST	<p>A longtime employee of the Seattle Department of Transportation who sent a Black woman racist and threatening messages at the height of the protests over the police killing of George Floyd in 2020 is still working with the city agency, despite concerns over his problematic history with the department and continued interaction with the public.</p> <p>Two summers ago, Kirk Calkins, a 55-year-old white street use inspector who has worked with the department for approximately 30 years, was angry over the Black Lives Matter protests and sent a Black stranger on Facebook a series of messages in response to a public post she made about the movement.</p> <p>"Why is Black America getting away with this?" he asked her. "The media won't show the truth, we are not going to take a blind eye to Black America in their tactics of taking advantage of hard working Americans."</p> <p>"When the Black race continues to show eggnorance [sic] and can not use their head with basic common sense in the decision they make, that is on them. They are not above the law as they think they are, we [are] tired of the im [sic] going to do what I want, when I want attitude, and not be accountable for their actions," Calkins wrote.</p>

But the message from Calkins that most alarmed the woman was the demand that she “bend over and grab her ankles,” according to department discipline records obtained by KNKX. The unidentified woman told SDOT investigators that she believed Calkins was referencing a violent sexual act and viewed his message as a threat.

Calkins told investigators he intended the comment to mean “screw you.”

A 30-day suspension and \$125,000 settlement

Department investigators who looked into the matter concluded that Calkins holds “deeply racist beliefs regarding Black people and displayed a willingness to threaten violence in furtherance of those beliefs.” Despite the outcome of the investigation, Calkins was not fired. Instead, he received a 30-day suspension last year.

In addition, the City of Seattle reached a settlement with Calkins at the beginning of this year, paying him \$125,000. The settlement stems from a 2020 lawsuit in which Calkins outlines a long list of grievances, including age and race discrimination against him and other colleagues, including at least one Black employee, retaliation and unfair hiring practices. The lawsuit was later amended to allege that the city violated his First Amendment rights by disciplining him for his social media activity. In the settlement, the city admits no wrongdoing.

SDOT received several complaints from the public as a result of the Facebook exchanges.

One person, whose name is redacted in the public records, told investigators: “If a stranger on a forum behind a screen can elicit this reaction from him, how can he be trusted to represent the city of Seattle in a public capacity when out in the field?” Street use inspectors are responsible for inspecting construction sites and delineating the right of way.

One friend, whose name is also redacted, described how the woman at the center of the exchanges “called [her] crying relentlessly [that] morning about messages from a man she does not know.”

Another friend told the city’s transportation department that she was reaching out “because I feel it is my responsibility as a friend and a decent human being to report harassment and racial gaslighting from one of your employees... As a bi-racial woman myself I am extremely saddened to know people like Kirk work for our city and further spread hatred and racism.”

The fallout of the investigation shows that it remains difficult for government agencies to discipline employees with potentially harmful views, even as departments at local and state levels espouse race and social justice initiatives, with the Seattle Department of Transportation declaring that it “believes transportation must meet the needs of communities of color.”

Records show that at least one SDOT employee objected to Calkins continuing on the job. Last summer, Christopher Luedke, an inspections manager wrote to others at the agency: “I find it difficult to wrap my head around the magnitude of damage this may eventually cause to the entire work group as a team in terms of trust in SDOT to truly uphold its stated principles in meaningful and effective ways.”

Luedke concluded that the agency had failed the public, and said he was professionally at a loss as a result.

SDOT employee accuses the city of discrimination

On May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, by kneeling on his neck for approximately nine minutes. In an interview with department officials, Calkins said he believed those protesting in the streets “should have looked into the situation” regarding Floyd’s killing before setting cars on fire and damaging buildings. He said he believed Floyd was “drugged up, resisting arrest” and “was wrong.”

“If he didn’t resist none of this would have happened,” he said.

But Calkins also said he shouldn't have referenced the Black race when writing to the woman on Facebook since he meant protesters specifically.

Calkins told investigators that he attended Nathan Hale High School when teens from Seattle's Central District were bused in in an effort to desegregate schools.

"I played football with these guys," he told investigators, while adding that African Americans had picked on the white kids.

"A bunch of kids slap you on the back of the neck, they call you redneck," he said. "I was fat, overweight, scared, they picked on the weak."

Calkins said he was recovering from surgery after breaking his neck while working and on pain medication when he sent the Facebook messages but claimed the woman had "race-baited him."

He also said his Facebook profile did not list the Seattle Department of Transportation as an employer, and that he made the comments as a private citizen while on leave and recovering from the surgery at home. Investigators said others disputed that assertion, and had seen the city or Seattle Department of Transportation listed as his employer on social media.

After Calkins was notified that a reporter had submitted a public records request asking for his discipline records, he went to court and attempted to stop the city from releasing them. When that failed, he wrote to KNKX earlier this year:

"I watched the city that I lived in and the city I worked in go through protests, looting and physical harm from BLM and Antifa protestors," he said. "SDOT and SDOT HR publicly embarrassed me, they had my work vehicle towed from my residence and I put my lap top computer in the car. I had no idea what was going on as SDOT HR told me nothing, months went by and I had no idea why I was placed on administrative leave."

Records show that Calkins was disciplined in at least two other instances: In 2003, the department demoted Calkins and suspended him for 30 days because he showed a supervisor sexually explicit photos of a colleague. In a recent interview, Calkins explained that his brother-in-law, who also worked for the city's transportation department, gave him the photos as proof that the affair he was having with this coworker was consensual. Calkins said he showed the photos to a supervisor in an attempt to defend his brother-in-law from any possible claims of sexual harassment.

Three years later, the department suspended Calkins for a day after he threatened to shove a coffee thermos down a colleague's throat.

In a recent interview, Calkins repeated what he has told supervisors over the years: that the city's hiring practices are unfair, especially to him – an older, white male.

"I have been held back for 30 years, I have been passed up for jobs because of my race and sex when is enough going to be enough? When are we going to start hiring the most qualified candidate instead," he wrote in a 2018 email to the city's Department of Human Resources.

The City of Seattle's Human Resources Department did not respond to questions when asked about Calkins and his claims of unfairness. The union that represents Calkins and other city employees – Protec17 – also declined to comment.

Seattle Department of Transportation officials said it could not answer questions about why the city had agreed to reach a settlement with Calkins but made clear they had hoped for a different outcome. The department directed questions about the settlement to the city attorney's office, but Anthony Derrick, communications director for the city attorney, declined to comment.

	<p>A 2018 report by Crosscut detailed frustrations with the City of Seattle's Human Resources Department, with some staff noting that complaints often went unaddressed and that the various HR departments in specific offices alongside the city's central HR office created an unwieldy structure. In an email, Jamie Housen, director of communications for Mayor Bruce Harrell, said Harrell is continuing to try to build consistency among HR departments.</p> <p>"The City has made me what I am today 'a Vocal white Male asking for fairness,'" Calkins wrote in an email to KNKX.</p> <p>"I'm a good person. I work hard. I treat everyone with respect until I'm being treated differently," Calkins said. "If you're going to judge me for being looped up on pain medication, that's not right at all."</p> <p>"My thing is being painted as a person that I'm not."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/31 Day 189 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/31/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-189-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine's counteroffensive to retake Kherson will be a "slow operation to grind the enemy", the senior presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych has said. "Of course, many would like a large-scale offensive with news about the capture by our military of a settlement in an hour," he wrote. "But we don't fight like that ... Funds are limited." • Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said "heavy fighting" continues in "almost the entire territory" of Kherson. A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command, Natalia Humeniuk, said Ukraine's forces had succeeded in damaging bridges that join Kherson across the river, rendering them "impassable for heavy machinery". • A Moscow-installed leader of occupied Kherson has reportedly fled to Russia. When asked by the Guardian about his location, Kirill Stremousov said he was currently "travelling around Russian cities, meeting different people for work". • The previous head of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, welcomed Ukraine's counterattacks in Kherson, saying it is a key moment in the war. Sir Alex Younger told the BBC that the fightback from Kyiv showed the two opposing forces had "reached some kind of balance, which is an unexpected and frankly welcome situation". • Ukraine is using wooden decoys of advanced US rocket systems to trick Russia into wasting its missiles on them, according to The Washington Post. The decoy versions of US-supplied rocket launcher systems drew at least 10 Russian Kalibr cruise missiles, leading Ukraine to further boost its production of replicas, in an effort to lure Moscow into firing its expensive long-range missiles on fake targets, the publication said. • The last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, has died in Moscow aged 91. Gorbachev's reforms led to the unlooked-for break-up of his own country, and to the demise of communism across central and eastern Europe. He died after a "difficult and protracted illness", Russian news agencies cited hospital officials as saying on Tuesday. Recent reports suggested he was had a kidney ailment. • The UN's cultural agency has said it supports a bid by Ukraine to put its port city of Odesa on the Unesco world heritage list of protected sites. The UN agency also said it wants to add Odesa, Kyiv and Lviv to the list of world heritage sites "in danger". Ukrainian officials said Moscow's forces are approaching Odesa and analysts believe Russia could soon target the city to completely block Ukraine's Black Sea access. • Ukraine's parliament endorsed several laws and ratifications on Tuesday to bring the country closer to the European Union, Volodymyr Zelenskiy said. "We are moving step by step towards full membership in the EU," he added. • Zelenskiy met with the UN nuclear watchdog chief who will lead an expert team to inspect the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine this week. "It's an important mission, and we're doing everything we can for it to be safe and work at full capacity,"

	<p>he said during a meeting with the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, on Tuesday. The head of the Russian-installed local administration, Yevgeny Balitsky, said he did not expect much from the IAEA visit and told the Interfax news agency the inspectors “must see the work of the station in one day”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine has accused Russia of deliberately shelling corridors to make it unsafe for the IAEA inspectors to visit the plant. The senior presidential adviser Andriy Yermak said Russia aimed to force the UN team through Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions temporarily occupied by Moscow’s forces. “Russia is trying to disrupt the visit of the IAEA mission to the nuclear power plant by simulating combat operations in Energodar and shelling the area near the nuclear power plant,” he said. Zelenskiy also claimed Russia “does not stop provocations precisely in those directions from which the mission is supposed to arrive at the station”. • At least five people were killed and 12 wounded in Russian shelling of Kharkiv, Zelenskiy said. “Only one Russian shelling of Kharkiv took the lives of five people today, another 12 were wounded.” • The wholesale price of gas has dropped sharply in a rare respite from recent highs on signs that Europe is preparing to intervene directly in energy markets. The European Commission said it was working “flat out” on an emergency package, and on a longer-term “structural reform of the electricity market” to combat soaring prices while efforts to fill gas storage facilities appear to be ahead of schedule. The day-ahead UK wholesale gas price tumbled by more than 20% to 447p per therm on Tuesday, while the month-ahead contract dropped by a quarter, to 473p per therm.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev dies
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/31/mikhail-gorbachev-tributes-pour-in-for-one-of-a-kind-soviet-leader
GIST	<p>Mikhail Gorbachev has been described as “one of the greatest figures of the 20th century” in a flood of tributes from across the world to the man universally credited with ending the cold war.</p> <p>There was gushing praise for the former Soviet president from past and present western leaders, political commentators, academics, historians and celebrities after his death in Russia on Tuesday night aged 91.</p> <p>President Joe Biden led the tributes from the Soviet Union’s old cold war adversary by saying he was a man of “remarkable vision”, and that he was held in high esteem for leading his country on the path to reform.</p> <p>“These were the acts of a rare leader – one with the imagination to see that a different future was possible and the courage to risk his entire career to achieve it,” Biden said in a statement. “The result was a safer world and greater freedom for millions of people.”</p> <p>António Guterres, general secretary of the United Nations, said Gorbachev was a “one-of-a kind statesman who changed the course of history”.</p> <p>“The world has lost a towering global leader, committed multilateralist, and tireless advocate for peace. I’m deeply saddened by his passing,” he tweeted.</p> <p>Boris Johnson, the outgoing British prime minister, said he “always admired the courage and integrity he showed in bringing the cold war to a peaceful conclusion”</p> <p>Sir Keir Starmer, UK opposition Labour leader, said: “One of the great figures of the 20th century, Mikhail Gorbachev’s pursuit of reform forged a path for diplomacy over conflict.</p> <p>“He will forever be remembered as the last leader of the Soviet Union who had the courage and conviction to end the cold war.”</p> <p>The president of the European Commission said Gorbachev’s legacy is “one we will not forget”.</p>

In a Twitter post, Ursula von der Leyen said: “Mikhail Gorbachev was a trusted and respected leader. He played a crucial role to end the Cold War and bring down the Iron Curtain. It opened the way for a free Europe. This legacy is one we will not forget. R.I.P Mikhail Gorbachev.”

French President Emmanuel Macron described Gorbachev as a “man of peace” on Twitter early on Wednesday, saying he “opened a path of liberty for Russians. His commitment to peace in Europe changed our shared history”.

In Russia, however, the official reaction to the death of the man blamed for unleashing chaotic capitalism on the crumbling Soviet empire was much cooler.

Russian president Vladimir Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine is seen as an attempt to restore some of the old Soviet borders, expressed “his deepest condolences” on Gorbachev’s death, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told Interfax news agency.

“Tomorrow he will send a telegram of condolences to his family and friends,” he said.

The report on the official Tass news agency was low on superlatives and merely said he had died and that “Gorbachev promoted glasnost ... and perestroika, a policy of political and economic reforms. He was the first and the last president of the Soviet Union, winning elections for the post in March 1990 and resigning on December 25, 1991”.

Vitaly Milonov, a Russian MP, said it was symbolic that Gorbachev died in the “year of the deconstruction of the world order”, referring to the invasion of Ukraine. He said the former Soviet president left a legacy “worse than Hitler for our country”, according to a tweet of a report in the pro-Kremlin Federal news agency.

Former US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, said Gorbachev “performed great services” but was “not able to implement all of his visions”, telling BBC’s Newsnight: “The people of eastern Europe and the German people, and in the end the Russian people, owe him a great debt of gratitude for the inspiration, for the courage in coming forward with these ideas of freedom.”

Kissinger, after again acknowledging Gorbachev was unable able to implement his full vision, added: “He will still be remembered in history as a man who started historic transformations that were to the benefit of mankind and to the Russian people.”

Chinese reaction has been muted with no official comments or condolences yet over the death of a man offering an example of how not to reform a one-party state.

However, the Global Times outlet gave a scathing assessment by “Chinese observers” who said Gorbachev’s “naive, immature and blind worship of the western system” led the USSR to lose its independence and remains a major lesson for China’s own governance.

Gorbachev’s main sparring partner in the west when he came to power was then US president Ronald Reagan and their ability to form a good relationship was a key factor in hastening the end of the cold war.

The Reagan Foundation and Institute set up by the late president said in a statement that it mourned the loss of a man “who once was a political adversary of Ronald Reagan’s who ended up becoming a friend. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Gorbachev family and the people of Russia”.

One of Gorbachev’s direct cold war adversaries, former US secretary of state, James Baker, who negotiated the reunification of Germany and the end of the cold war, said: “History will remember Mikhail Gorbachev as a giant who steered his great nation towards democracy. He played the critical role in a

peaceful conclusion of the Cold War by his decision against using force to hold the empire together ... The free world misses him greatly.”

Another who dealt with was Canada’s former prime minister, Brian Mulroney. “He was a good friend, surprising as that might seem,” he said. “He was a very pleasant man to deal with and he had great vision for the future of his country which is antithetical to that being articulated now. History will remember him as a great transformational leader.”

Dan Rather, the famous American news anchor who reported on many of the changes wrought by Gorbachev’s reforms, said: “At inflection points in history some leaders rise, others falter. Mikhail Gorbachev, who passed away today, rose to make our world safer. He was imperfect, as we all are. But he had a vision for stability over chaos and ultimately freedom over repression. We need more of that.”

John Simpson, the BBC broadcaster who covered many of the post-1989 upheavals, also met Gorbachev and paid tribute to “a decent, well intentioned, principled man who tried to rescue the unrescuable”. He added: “In private he was charming & surprisingly amusing. It wasn’t his fault things went so wrong.”

Anne Applebaum, historian of eastern Europe, said: “Not many people have it in their power to change the world as much as Mikhail Gorbachev did. Even if he didn’t start out wanting to do so.”

Australia’s prime minister Anthony Albanese said Gorbachev “freed the nations of eastern Europe from the prison of Soviet rule”, and helped bring an end to the cold war. “With his death we have lost one of the true giants of the 20th century,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Navy intervenes; Iran seizes US sea drone
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/30/us-navy-drone-iran-persian-gulf
GIST	<p>Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard seized an American sea drone in the Persian Gulf and tried to tow it away, only releasing the unmanned vessel when a US navy warship and helicopter approached, according to US officials.</p> <p>The incident on Tuesday marks the first time the navy’s Middle East-based fifth fleet’s new drone taskforce has been targeted by Iran.</p> <p>While the interception ended without incident, tensions remain high between Washington and Tehran as negotiations over the Islamic Republic’s tattered nuclear deal with world powers hang in the balance.</p> <p>The Guard’s Shahid Baziar warship attached a line to the Saildrone Explorer in the central part of the Persian Gulf in international waters late on Monday night, said Cmdr Timothy Hawkins, a fifth fleet spokesman. The vessel then began towing the Saildrone Explorer, which carries cameras, radars and sensors for remotely monitoring the sea, Hawkins said.</p> <p>The USS Thunderbolt, a navy coastal patrol boat, as well as an MH-60 Seahawk helicopter, moved to shadow the Guard’s ship. The navy called the Shahid Baziar by radio to identify the drone as American, Hawkins said.</p> <p>“Our response was one that as such made clear that this was US government property and was operating in international waters and that we had every intention to take action if necessary,” the commander told the Associated Press.</p> <p>Hawkins said the incident ended peacefully after some four hours as the Iranians unhooked the tow line to the drone and left the area as the American forces were nearby.</p> <p>US army Gen Michael “Erik” Kurilla, who leads the military’s Central Command, praised the Thunderbolt’s crew for its response.</p>

	<p>“This incident once again demonstrates Iran’s continued destabilizing, illegal and unprofessional activity in the Middle East,” he said in a statement.</p> <p>Iran’s paramilitary Guard, which answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, did not acknowledge the incident. Iran’s mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The fifth fleet launched its unmanned Task Force 59 last year. The fifth fleet’s area of responsibility includes the crucial Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil passes.</p> <p>It also stretches as far as the Red Sea reaches near the Suez Canal, the waterway in Egypt linking the Middle East to the Mediterranean, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen.</p> <p>It also represents a region that has seen a series of attacks at sea in recent years. Off Yemen, bomb-laden drone boats and mines set adrift by Yemen’s Houthi rebels have damaged vessels amid that country’s years-long war. Near the United Arab Emirates and the Strait of Hormuz, oil tankers have been seized by Iranian forces. Others have been attacked in incidents the navy blames on Iran.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/31 Mass exodus: Australia faces loss 600,000
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/31/mass-exodus-australia-faces-loss-of-600000-people-and-skills-recovery-will-be-slow-ceda-says
GIST	<p>Australia’s net overseas migration will not fully recover until 2024 as the nation faces a “cumulative” loss of more than 600,000 people due largely to the pandemic, an economic thinktank says.</p> <p>The Committee for Economic Development of Australia (Ceda) has released a report calling on the Albanese government to “outline how it intends to address the Covid-19 induced drag on the migration system”, specifically by raising migration and clearing visa processing backlogs.</p> <p>“New approaches are now required in an environment where advanced economies are simultaneously facing pandemic induced skills shortages and major economic transitions in climate and energy, technology and caring that all demand skilled labour,” Ceda said in a new report.</p> <p>Ahead of the jobs and skills summit on Thursday and Friday, Ceda has proposed that various lists of skills shortages that qualify for different visas should be consolidated into one, or replaced by a wage threshold and jobs matching mechanisms.</p> <p>It has called for an essential skills visa to provide a boost to the aged care, childcare, disability and healthcare workforces.</p> <p>“Temporary skilled migrants now account for around 0.7 per cent of the labour force, less than half the level when temporary skilled migration peaked shortly after the mining boom,” Ceda found.</p> <p>“Australia’s migration system has been playing catch-up since borders reopened. Net overseas migration will not fully recover until 2024, a loss of over 600,000 people since the middle of 2020, 83 per cent of whom are generally of working age.</p> <p>The education minister, Jason Clare, on Tuesday suggested some of Australia’s workforce shortages could be eased by allowing international students to stay longer.</p> <p>Under current rules, some students are entitled to stay only 18 months after they finished their degree or diploma.</p>

Clare told the Australian Financial Review higher education summit that only 16% of international students stay on after their studies.

“A lot of those students are delivering us food and serving coffee in between classes,” he said.

“But when they graduate, they go home. Wouldn’t it be great if they stayed on and helped us fill some of the chronic skills gaps we have got?”

“Seems like a no brainer. Other countries have cottoned on to this and have changed their visa settings and it’s something I think that’s worth looking at here too.”

Proposals and debate ahead of the jobs summit may not agree on the level of migration that Australia should have, but they agree on the important role migration should play and that the skilled migration system must be made simpler, more efficient and transparent.

Unions have accepted that permanent migration can rise by 40,000 to 200,000 a year, provided the government enacted other protections and levers to encourage wage growth, including a pay floor of \$90,000 for temporary skilled migrants.

Summit guest list revealed

Meanwhile, the guest list for the summit has been released.

It includes seaweed farmers Sea Forest, property management tech startup :Different, and playwrighting prize administrators the Lysicrates Foundation.

According to the attender list, released by the treasurer Jim Chalmers, the event featuring employers, unions, government and civil society has ballooned to 143 participants, up from the initial 100.

These include Sea Forest chief executive, Sam Elsom, whose company fights climate change by being the first in the world to cultivate edible red macroalgae (Asparagopsis) at a commercial scale.

As a feed supplement for cows, the seaweed can lower methane production – likely to be a big hit at the summit’s “workforce opportunities from clean energy and tackling climate change” session on Thursday.

:Different co-founder, Mina Radhakrishnan, a board member of the Tech Council of Australia, and John Azarias, chairman of Lysicrates Foundation and former senior tax partner at Deloitte will also attend.

Anthony Albanese has defended the government’s decision not to invite the big four banks, some of Australia’s largest employers, citing the fact the Australian Banking Association will participate.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Army grounds fleet of Chinook helicopters
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-army-grounds-entire-fleet-of-chinook-helicopters-11661894466?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>The U.S. Army has grounded its entire fleet of CH-47 Chinook helicopters because of a risk of engine fires, U.S. officials said.</p> <p>Army officials are aware of a small number of engine fires with the helicopters, and the incidents didn’t result in any injuries or deaths, the U.S. officials said. One of the officials said the fires occurred in recent days.</p> <p>The U.S. Army Materiel Command grounded the fleet of hundreds of helicopters “out of an abundance of caution,” but officials were looking at more than 70 aircraft that contained a part that is suspected to be connected to the problem, officials said.</p>

	<p>The grounding of the Chinook helicopters, a battlefield workhorse since the 1960s, could pose logistical challenges for American soldiers, depending on how long the order lasts.</p> <p>The grounding was targeted at certain Boeing Co.-made models with engines manufactured by Honeywell International Inc., people familiar with the matter said. The grounding took effect within about the last 24 hours, these people said. The Army has about 400 helicopters in its fleet, one of the U.S. officials said.</p> <p>Boeing declined to comment, referring questions to the Army.</p> <p>A Honeywell spokesman said the engine maker worked with the Army to determine that certain components known as O-rings didn't meet the company's design specifications. He said the parts were installed during routine maintenance at an Army facility. While he declined to name the company that made the parts, the Honeywell spokesman said the company is working to supply the Army with replacements.</p> <p>An Army spokeswoman said the service has identified the root cause of fuel leaks that caused "a small number of engine fires among an isolated number" of the helicopters. She said the Army is taking steps to resolve the issue.</p> <p>"The safety of our soldiers is the Army's top priority, and we will ensure our aircraft remain safe and airworthy," the spokeswoman said.</p> <p>The Chinook is a heavy-lift utility helicopter that is used by both regular and special Army forces, ferrying more than four dozen troops or cargo. It has been a staple of the Army's helicopter fleet for six decades.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Texas person diagnosed w/monkeypox dies
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/texas-reports-first-death-of-a-person-diagnosed-with-monkeypox-11661880117?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>A person in Texas who was diagnosed with monkeypox and had a weak immune system has died, Texas state health officials said Tuesday, in what could be the first-known fatality from the virus in the U.S.</p> <p>The Texas Department of State Health Services said this was the first death of a person diagnosed with monkeypox in Texas. Officials are investigating what role monkeypox played in the death. They said the patient, who was an adult and a resident of Harris County, Texas, was "severely immunocompromised" but didn't offer additional details.</p> <p>In a statement, Texas health commissioner Dr. John Hellerstedt said that "monkeypox is a serious disease, particularly for those with weakened immune systems." He urged those who have been exposed or have symptoms to seek treatment.</p> <p>A representative for the Texas health department didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Monkeypox, which causes a chicken-pox-like rash and other symptoms, was until recently rarely found outside certain parts of West and Central Africa. A recent outbreak, first detected in the U.K., has now led to more than 48,400 confirmed cases across about five dozen countries where it isn't typically seen, including many in Europe and the Americas, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>In the U.S. there have been 18,100 confirmed cases and there had been no reported deaths as of last week, according to the CDC. Around the world there have been 15 deaths this year, including six in locations where monkeypox isn't typically seen, the CDC said.</p> <p>The agency has said known infections have been mostly among men who have sex with men.</p>

The CDC didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about the Texas death.

[Federal officials have declared](#) monkeypox a public-health emergency, and the World Health Organization declared it a [global health emergency](#).

The CDC recommends people who have been exposed to monkeypox and those who are at higher risk of being exposed to the virus, such as men who have had multiple sexual partners in recent weeks, to get vaccinated. For the most part, health officials are using a two-dose vaccine called Jynneos, which was primarily developed for smallpox.

Early symptoms can include fever, headache, muscle aches, backache, swollen glands, chills and exhaustion, before a chicken-pox-like rash usually appears, beginning on the face then spreading to other parts of the body. The rash eventually forms scabs, which later fall off.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 KCRHA wants \$90M more for homeless
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3612833/regional-homeless-authority-90-million-king-co-councilman-dunn-calls-audit/
GIST	<p>As the number of people living on the streets appears to soar, the King County Regional Homeless Authority (KCRHA) has announced it wants another \$90 million annually to deal with this troubled population – but King County Councilman Reagan Dunn says he wants an audit first.</p> <p>“More money is not the solution to this problem,” Dunn told Dori Monson Show listeners Tuesday. “We need some ‘tough love’ strategies to hold people accountable. We’ve got to stop the out-of-flow homeless population. We have a moral obligation to take care of our own homeless folks but not a moral obligation to take care of people being bused from Detroit or Miami or Texas.”</p> <p>Already, Dori noted, King County has been receiving about \$120 million a year from local taxpayers. The \$90 million increase sought by KCRHA would amount to a 75% increase.</p> <p>What’s driving the request for more money? A dramatic increase in the so-called “one-night count,” which attempts to tally the number of people living on the streets and tapping into homeless resources throughout King County. When Marc Dones was hired as chief executive officer of the KCRHA in 2021, he cited the need for an accurate count as vital to “understand the scope and scale of the problem in order to design solutions to meet the need.”</p> <p>But Dunn – a self-described “budget hawk” – questions the disparity in numbers that are being reported by KCRHA and other homeless agencies. One count shows 13,368 in 2021, while another points to 40,800. Both are higher than 2020 tallies.</p> <p>“We’re seeing dramatic increases in the one-night count population . . . and there has not been an audit of the authority,” Dunn told Dori. “It’s kind of a perfect storm: when you allow drugs and you don’t enforce laws and you don’t have a mechanism to keep people from coming in from out-of-state and benefiting from the subsidies paid for by King County taxpayers, it’s going to keep getting worse until we change our policies.”</p> <p>In comparison, Dunn points out, Los Angeles County – with an overall population five times that of King County – spends \$400 million on its homeless issues. That, Dunn says, means L.A. is addressing the related problems with about “half our funding. More money is not the solution to this problem.”</p> <p>Since King County enacted a “well-intentioned 10-year Plan to End Homelessness” in 2004, nearly \$1 billion has been spent on those who tap into homeless services, Dori said. And yet, he added, the numbers have grown. One report shows that between King County, Seattle, and federal budgets, more than \$195 million was spent on local homelessness in 2017 alone.</p>

	<p>“Money is creating the problem,” Dunn said. “The more free stuff you give out in Free-attle, the more subsidized and free housing, the more you’re doing to draw more people from outside the community in. That’s one of the reasons we think we need to do something about accountability to the taxpayer.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Jayapal benefits by extra police security
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3610808/rantz-rep-jayapal-recieved-extra-police-security-denying-scotus-families/
GIST	<p>A month after Rep. Pramila Jayapal voted to deny funding for around-the-clock security for the families of Supreme Court justices, the Seattle Democrat received around-the-clock security for herself and her family.</p> <p>King County prosecutors say you can hear Brett Forsell shout obscenities outside Jayapal’s home on July 9 via surveillance footage exclusively obtained by the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. They say he also set up a tent near her home and told police he would return. After his arrest, prosecutors charged Forsell with felony stalking. He pleaded not guilty.</p> <p>Jayapal called 911 to report the incident, but she also alerted the U.S. Capitol Police. As a result, she and her family received protection for roughly three weeks.</p> <p>Special protection</p> <p>Forsell was booked for the alleged crime, and the arrest caught him by surprise. In a video obtained by the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH, Forsell tells police, “you don’t bring murderers to jail now.”</p> <p>After the arrest, a special agent with the U.S. Capitol Police reached out to the Seattle Police Department (SPD) with a request.</p> <p>“We have the ability to provide funding for some things and I wanted to see what the possibilities were for naming like an off-duty position for her house for the next couple of weeks,” he asked in a call exclusively obtained by the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.</p> <p>Soon, security was staged outside of Jayapal’s home. A source tells me that while the security might have been off-duty officers, it was not arranged via the SPD, but by a third party. The source tells me the Mayor’s office was involved, but that office did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>While the U.S. Capitol Police also declined to comment, Jayapal told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH that security was present for “about three weeks.”</p> <p>“Largely because he [Forsell] lives six blocks from me, so the threat assessment level is high based on his weapon and location. It may continue depending on ongoing threat assessment,” Jayapal wrote.</p> <p>Neither the U.S. Capitol Police, nor the congresswoman’s office would confirm whether the security was requested by the congresswoman or offered proactively.</p> <p>Just over one month earlier, a man was arrested in an assassination plot against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. It renewed a push for security for the justices and their families. After finally making it to the House floor for a vote, Jayapal voted against it. She was looking for a companion bill that offers protections for abortion providers.</p> <p>Has this changed Jayapal’s view on police?</p> <p>After this incident, Jayapal said she appreciated the officers for the work they did on the night of the harassment. This is in stark contrast from her record generalizing cops as racist killers.</p>

	<p>The congresswoman continues to falsely claim a police officer “murdered” Michael Brown. She baselessly claimed that Seattle police officers “were among the people attacking the Capitol,” implying they could have “ties to white nationalist groups.” She claimed that US Capitol Police permitted the January 6 rioters because they were majority white. Jayapal also demanded we “reimagine policing” and divert funds from police departments.</p> <p>Jayapal tells the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH that her views on police remain consistent. She says that they play an important role, particularly when it comes to violent crime, but “they can’t do it alone, don’t want to and shouldn’t have to.”</p> <p>Her office, however, would not explain if she regrets her vote against added security.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 King Co. scrambles over monkeypox
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/08/lack-care-monkeypox-response-echoes-homophobia-past-crises
GIST	<p>Seattle novelist Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, who edited an anthology of writing about the AIDS crisis, believes the federal response to the monkeypox outbreak demonstrates how little it learned from HIV and COVID.</p> <p>“Unlike both COVID and HIV, we have a vaccine,” Sycamore said, referring to the Jynneos vaccine, which remains in short supply in the U.S. “We have a treatment: an antiviral medication. And we have a pre-approved test. And yet there still isn’t enough access. I really believe this lack of access is because of a lack of care.”</p> <p>Yet despite the federal government’s slow response, public health officials in King County have scrambled to vaccinate the highest risk populations – men who have sex with men, and especially those who have multiple partners – while also trying to avoid stigmatizing those most likely to get the disease. It’s been a delicate balance to strike.</p> <p>Although monkeypox cases in King County spiked in late July at 61 cases in one week, the disease, which spreads from skin-to-skin contact or from contact with unwashed clothes or bedding, has in the past two weeks begun to level off.</p> <p>According to Public Health Seattle & King County, there have been a total of 323 confirmed monkeypox cases in King County. At a press conference on Aug. 9, county health officer Jeffrey Duchin said that about 75% of those cases have been in Seattle, and the majority of cases are among men between the ages of 18 and 49.</p> <p>Seattle architect Andrew Grant Houston, who ran for mayor in 2021, was one of the lucky few to get vaccinated in early August at the sexual health clinic at Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>“I find this entire situation frustrating and disappointing,” Houston said. “They’re working with the materials that they have, but it doesn’t feel as strong of a response as you would like for something that’s very concerning.”</p> <p>Monkeypox, first identified in 1958, was for decades generally confined to tropical rainforests of central and west Africa. The origin of the current global outbreak, which began in April, hasn’t been determined. But as of Aug. 26, the World Health Organization reported that more than 46,000 cases have been confirmed worldwide outside of the endemic regions in Africa. According to the CDC, as of Aug. 25, nearly 17,000 cases have been documented in the U.S., with no fatalities yet recorded.</p> <p>Although related to smallpox, monkeypox is much less dangerous, with a historical fatality rate of about 3%. Nevertheless, it’s a painful, unpleasant and serious disease. Monkeypox generally begins with a rash, and then a series of blisters and lesions that can develop all over the body. When those lesions occur in sensitive areas such as the genitals or anus, they can be excruciatingly painful. The disease usually lasts</p>

two to four weeks, and quarantining for that length of time can be an immense burden, especially for people with limited sick leave or personal time.

According to a report in The New York Times, the U.S. [once had a stockpile](#) of 20 million doses of Jynneos smallpox vaccine, which is also effective in preventing monkeypox. But by May of this year the country had let those doses expire and had a mere 2,400 doses on hand. The U.S. was slow to address that shortage, and it wasn't until early August that the Biden administration finally [declared monkeypox a public health emergency](#), after the World Health Organization declared [monkeypox a global health emergency](#) on July 22. By then there was an overwhelming global demand for the vaccine. In response, the CDC issued guidelines aimed at preventing transmission, which advised against anonymous sex, attending dances and raves in which skin-to-skin contact was likely and reducing the number of sexual partners.

"The echoes to the AIDS crisis are so direct," said Sycamore, who edited "[Between Certain Death and a Possible Future](#)," a collection of queer writing on the legacy of HIV published in 2021. "You see these images of gay men covered in sores. And then this resurgence of sexual moralism that's blaming people for their actions rather than blaming the government, or our structural racism and homophobia."

Locally, availability of the vaccine has been severely limited – though in the past two weeks, the situation seems to be improving. At the Aug. 9 press conference, Duchin said Public Health estimated there are about 40,000 people at risk of contracting monkeypox in the county who would benefit from the vaccine. But Duchin said that by Aug. 9 the county had only received enough Jynneos to vaccinate 4,400 people.

Early pop-up clinics were crowded and overwhelmed. Grant Houston said several of his friends went to a vaccine pop-up clinic at Seattle Central College on Capitol Hill in early August and faced a three- to four-hour wait. "They went and then gave up because the line was longer than the number of shots available," Houston said.

Sam Chapman, who performs in drag as Jane Don't at Queerbar on Capitol Hill, was frustrated by this lack of access. When a friend came down with monkeypox in July, Chapman decided to travel to British Columbia to get the vaccine.

"The process was actually much easier and less stressful than I anticipated," Chapman said. Border patrol didn't ask questions and the clinic didn't seem to mind if patients were from the U.S. Chapman received the vaccine in Abbotsford at a rural clinic, which they said also seemed to be a horse clinic.

"There's a ketamine joke in there somewhere," Chapman quipped.

Jonny Cruz also traveled to British Columbia and got the monkeypox vaccine at Fraser Health in Vancouver. At the clinic, Cruz was asked a few questions to determine if he was in the higher-risk category and within 20 minutes he got his first dose of the vaccine (Jynneos is a two-dose vaccine).

In response to his frustration from trying to find accurate information, [Cruz created an online resource guide](#) to help other queer men access information about the disease. He feels the lackluster national response is directly related to homophobia.

"If it was more straight people who were getting it," Cruz said, "I can guarantee you the vaccine rollout would have been a lot quicker."

Sycamore, who was able to get a vaccine after receiving a tip about open appointments, believes the fact that queer men have to travel three hours north of the border to get the vaccine speaks volumes. "You know this country is doing something wrong when people are leaving the country to get their health care," she said.

The scarcity created by the slow national response evokes the long, terrible history of the AIDS crisis, Sycamore says. "When we have this homophobic lack of response, there's no way for trauma not to

reemerge. That trauma has never been dealt with. There has never been accountability for the government's neglect.”

Sycamore has been advocating for months on [Twitter](#) for a more care-centered response to the outbreak. “The way to reach people most in need is not to make people stand in line. It’s to go to where they are,” she said.

To that end, Public Health Seattle & King County has been making a concerted effort in the past several weeks to expand outreach to queer spaces and places where people of color feel more comfortable getting the vaccine.

On Aug. 14, public health officials worked in collaboration with the Lumberyard, a queer bar in White Center, to set up a free monkeypox vaccine clinic. More than 560 people, many of them Latino and people of color, were vaccinated, said owner Nathan Adams, who helped promote the pop-up clinic through social media channels.

“The response from the community for the vaccination clinic was super,” Adams said. “I was stunned. [Public Health] was very, very efficient. The speed at which they were moving people through here was exceptional.”

Also exceptional is the effort to rebuild the Lumberyard, a beloved fixture of White Center’s LGBTQ community, after it burned down in 2021. An online fundraising effort led by White Center Pride raised \$100,000 in a matter of days after the fire. Adams says the bar is nearly ready for a reopening in September. Public health officials reached out to him, looked at the state of the construction, and were convinced the Lumberyard was the perfect spot for a pop-up clinic.

“They’re doing a better job than I thought they would,” Adams said of public health’s efforts. “They’re really targeting Spanish-speaking and African American communities, because those are usually communities who don’t have health care or aren’t as proactive with health care because of the stigma that goes with it.”

Steven Sawyer, president of Pacific Northwest Black Pride, reached out to public health officials in August to urge them to set up a monkeypox vaccine clinic at the organization’s annual Cultural Health and Wellness Festival at Jimi Hendrix Park in the Central District. “We insisted, and we held their feet to the fire,” Sawyer said in an interview at the festival on Aug. 21 amid thumping music and an array of booths dedicated to health information.

“It’s horrible that in Atlanta, nearly 90% of cases are among Black men who have sex with men. How could we not see this coming?” Sawyer said. He believes the festival was an ideal spot for a vaccine clinic because it was aimed at creating a “space that’s comfortable, where people can find connection.”

The clinic had enough doses for 200 people to get vaccinated, said Michael Young-Hall, an official with Public Health Seattle - King County. Young-Hall noted that a newly approved injection technique for getting more doses from each Jynneos vaccine vial – which has effectively tripled or quadrupled the number of doses available – is being employed by medical professionals at pop-ups such as this one. “It required some training for some of the nurses,” he said, “but many were already familiar with it.”

He noted that public health has future plans to work at sites including UW Medicine in Kent, Sea-Mar health centers in South King County and gay bathhouses such as SteamWorks on Capitol Hill in order to reach out to those higher risk communities.

Unlike previous events like the one at Seattle Central College, the pop-up clinic at the Black Pride wellness festival was a calm, quiet scene with almost no line. Many people who walked up had time to casually chat with public health staff and learn more about the vaccine. Dwayne King, a board member with the multicultural health nonprofit POCAAN, another event sponsor, said this sort of environment is

	<p>critical for people of color, many of whom have valid reasons for being skeptical of the health care establishment.</p> <p>“It allows people to go ask questions about the side effects, talk about the effectiveness of it, and then see people that look like us,” King said.</p> <p>“Does someone really want to go to an STI clinic and wait three hours?” King said. He told the story of one person he observed at the festival who was shocked to see a clinic there, asked a few questions and then got the vaccine. “They were very grateful because they work a 9 to 5 job and they’d been trying to set up appointments, and it was not working,” he said.</p> <p>Sycamore believes this sort of approach is a better takeaway from the traumatic experiences the country went through trying to survive HIV and COVID. “The legacy of crisis should be communal care. Where is that lesson, that legacy? Or do we just keep having too little too late?”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Lake Chelan fire areas in evacuation order
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/level-3-evacuation-notice-given-areas-lake-chelan-fire/MR4HHXDQ3JCZZFZKP6BECNOT7E/
GIST	<p>A Level 3 “Go Now!” evacuation order was given to homeowners on Windy Ridge and Horizon lanes in Lake Chelan after seven separate fires were spotted around 2 p.m. Tuesday.</p> <p>Agencies were reporting multiple fires off Union Valley Road between mileposts 2 and 5.</p> <p>Union Valley Road and Cagle Gulch roads are closed to through traffic.</p> <p>The fires are happening just north of the Lake Chelan Golf Course.</p> <p>An area north of the Level 3 evacuation area is under a Level 1 evacuation — be on alert — or standby for evacuation.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 NICC Oregon fire threatens 7,000 structures
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fire-threatening-over-7000-structures-in-southwest-oregon
GIST	<p>OREGON - The Rum Creek Fire in remote southwest Oregon has burned nearly 18.75 square miles is threatening thousands of homes and is only about 1% contained.</p> <p>As of Tuesday morning, the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center said 5,035 homes and more than 2,600 other structures were at risk, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported. Officials have said the fire has destroyed one home and two structures.</p> <p>High temperatures and shifting winds in the next several days are expected to increase fire danger and cause the blaze to become more active, officials said.</p> <p>Mandatory evacuations are in place for dozens of homes near the towns of Rand and Galice. Lower level evacuations are in effect for some surrounding areas.</p> <p>Heavy smoke kept temperatures down and helped increase humidity levels, so fire activity slowed on Monday, the update said. The smoke also curtailed air operations and the fire grew by nearly 3.1 square miles.</p> <p>More than 1,300 firefighters are working the blaze with additional personnel arriving. Crews from California are working with the Oregon State Fire Marshall on structure protection, including areas east of the fire, where it is most active, officials said.</p>

	<p>One firefighter was killed one day after the fire began, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry. Shortly after 4 p.m. on Aug. 18, officials learned that a firefighter had been critically injured after being struck by a tree while working to extinguish the Rum Creek Fire.</p> <p>The firefighter, who was identified as 25-year-old Logan Taylor, was flown to a hospital to be treated, but later died.</p> <p>An air quality advisory has been issued for the area with the worst rating possible — hazardous — in Grants Pass, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Ukraine frontline units trade tanks, artillery
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/world/europe/ukrainian-soldiers-weapons-front-line.html
GIST	<p>DONETSK REGION, Ukraine — The Ukrainian sergeant slid the captured Russian rocket launcher into the center of a small room. He was pleased. The weapon was practically brand-new. It had been built in 2020, and its thermobaric warhead was deadly against troops and armored vehicles.</p> <p>But the sergeant, nicknamed Zmei, had no plans to fire it at advancing Russian soldiers or at a tank trying to burst through his unit's front line in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Instead, he was going to use it as a bargaining chip.</p> <p>Within the 93rd Mechanized Brigade, Zmei was not just a lowly sergeant. He was the brigade's point man for a wartime bartering system among Ukrainian forces. Prevalent along the front line, the exchange operates like a kind of shadow economy, soldiers say, in which units acquire weapons or equipment and trade them for supplies they need urgently.</p> <p>Most of the bartering involves items captured from Russian troops. Ukrainian soldiers refer to them as "trophies."</p> <p>"Usually, the trades are done really fast," Zmei said last week during an interview in Ukraine's mineral-rich Donbas region, where the 93rd is now stationed. "Let's just call it a simplification of bureaucracy."</p> <p>Despite the influx of Western weapons and equipment in recent months, the Ukrainian military still relies heavily on arms and vehicles captured from their better-equipped Russian foe for the matériel needed to wage war; much of Ukraine's aging Soviet-era arsenal is either destroyed, worn down or lacks ammunition.</p> <p>That has left Ukrainian soldiers scrounging the battlefield for essentials as their own supply lines are strained. And the relatively small numbers of big-ticket foreign weapons, such as the American-made M777 howitzer, are thinly spread on the sprawling 1,500-mile front.</p> <p>"We have hopes for Kyiv," said Fedir, one of the brigade's supply sergeants and an understudy of Zmei, referring to military commanders in the capital. "But we rely on ourselves. We aren't trying to just sit and wait like idiots until Kyiv sends us something."</p> <p>To protect against reprisals, Zmei, Fedir and others interviewed for this article requested that only their given names or nicknames be used.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the equipment exchanges.</p> <p>Capturing Russian items has become increasingly difficult as the war moves into a more static phase, with Russia's grinding artillery war forcing Ukrainians to slowly retreat in the east, while trying to</p>

regain territory in the south. That has created even higher demand for items traded in the soldiers' underground exchange.

Such was the case in early May, when the 93rd — a renowned unit that had fought in almost every major battle of the war — was operating around the Russian-occupied city of Izium. Zmei, who before the war owned a small publishing house that specialized in dark fantasy novels, received an innocuous text message from a nearby Ukrainian commander.

“Hi,” the message read. “Listen, here’s the thing, we have a needless tank, a T-72 a bit damaged.”

“And we’d exchange it for something nice,” the commander added.

The series of text messages, sent over the messaging application Telegram and reviewed by The New York Times, is just one example of the type of equipment that is unofficially swapping hands.

The commander’s requests were modest: a transport truck and a couple of sniper rifles in return for the Russian trophy tank. But Zmei told his customer, “This is too few things for a tank, write down what else you need.” The commander responded that he had plenty of tanks and wanted only the items requested.

When the commander mentioned all the tanks in his unit’s possession, Zmei sensed an opportunity to expand the trade. He wanted more tanks, and noted that the 93rd had foreign-supplied anti-tank missiles and U.S. portable surface-to-air missile systems available for a swap.

“Can get the launchers for a Stinger, NLAWs, various large stuff for a trade — and a lot of that,” Zmei said, referring to some of the Western weapons, which cost tens of thousands of dollars apiece.

Of the more than half-dozen soldiers interviewed for this article, most said that this underground economy was driven by the need to survive. Sometimes, they said, that meant circumventing a clumsy bureaucracy.

Although soldiers said that they were supposed to send captured equipment up the supply chain back to Kyiv, they noted that there was little effort to investigate the underground exchanges, let alone punish anyone for doing it.

Western governments, having [provided billions of dollars of military equipment](#), have pressed Ukraine to safeguard against possible corruption in the distribution process, but so far there have been no documented cases of weapons ending up in the hands of anyone apart from other Ukrainian units.

But even keeping the transfer of weapons unofficial can cause problems.

Matt Schroeder, an analyst at the Small Arms Survey, a research organization, said that informal transfers of matériel between units “could undermine stockpile management procedures,” but that “such transfers are not, in themselves, indicative of trafficking or leakage.”

Sitting near the turret of a captured Russian T-80 tank, a Ukrainian soldier named Alex explained that sending captured equipment back to Kyiv for official accounting was problematic.

“There is no guarantee that we’re going to get it back anytime soon,” he said. “We try to do it mostly ourselves.”

A former software engineer from Ukraine’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, Alex is a celebrity in the 93rd. His captured tank, nicknamed Bunny, with him in command, destroyed several Russian armored vehicles around Izium and the northeastern city of Sumy earlier in the war, Ukrainian commanders said.

But now the tank is far from the front and awaiting a turret repair. An important part for that work was recently acquired by trading a 120-millimeter mortar and a heavy machine gun with another unit, Alex said.

Just as he was speaking, a captured Russian armored personnel carrier rolled into the repair bay. It parked behind a barely running Ukrainian armored vehicle that one soldier joked had probably participated in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Alex is waiting for his own kind of repairs. He was shot in the right leg during a patrol in May. The bullet shattered his femur.

He and several other Ukrainian soldiers had been on a reconnaissance patrol in the gray zone — the area between Russian and Ukrainian front lines — when he was hit. The mission had carried two objectives, he said: to find Russian positions and to find abandoned equipment.

“We are losing tanks,” Alex said. “If this war goes the distance, sooner or later we’ll be out of Soviet equipment and other Soviet tanks, so we will have to switch to something else.”

Near his subterranean headquarters not far from the front line, Alex’s battalion commander, Bogdan, described the severity of his unit’s situation. The sound of incoming and outgoing artillery echoed in the fields beyond.

“We’re fighting with whatever we captured from the enemy,” Bogdan said, noting that 80 percent of his current supplies was captured Russian equipment.

“It’s no better in other battalions,” he added.

Bogdan’s unit of around 700 troops had arrived to replace Ukrainian forces worn down by casualties and equipment loss. Now, after six months of acting like a “firefighter” by rushing from one frontline hot spot to the next, his troops were facing a similar fate.

“We are losing a lot of men,” Bogdan said. “We can’t cope with their artillery. This, and airstrikes, are big problems.”

Asked about sophisticated, Western-supplied weapons that government officials say will be the big difference-maker, he said that in his brigade, “nobody has foreign equipment,” adding, “We have a great many questions as to where it goes.”

Those questions have fallen on a 28-year-old Ukrainian soldier who goes by the name of Michael. He lives in a small rundown single-story house several miles from the front line. An infantry soldier by trade, he is currently Bogdan’s supply officer.

In Michael’s squalid kitchen are printouts tacked to the wall listing the Western equipment his battalion desperately needs: encrypted radios, semiautomatic grenade launchers and Polish 155-millimeter howitzers, known as Krabs.

A Krab unit commander named Andriy said that his howitzers were not available for trade, though he might consider a swap if offered a French self-propelled artillery piece in exchange.

The 93rd currently only possesses old Soviet-era artillery pieces that have worn out barrels and are low on ammunition.

“I have to go and buy everything and trade things, and bring it all here,” Michael said.

“So what’s going on is a personal initiative,” he said. “You’re taking the risk, it’s criminal. Nobody will thank you. It’s a thankless job.”

HEADLINE	08/30 Iraq Shiite factions enter deadly new phase
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/world/middleeast/iraq-baghdad-clashes.html
GIST	<p>After years of harsh repression under Saddam Hussein, Iraq's majority Shiites finally came to political power in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion, and have largely held on to it through wrenching chapters of sectarian civil war, terrorist uprisings and internal tensions.</p> <p>Now, long-building frictions among some Shiite factions have erupted into deadly fighting on the streets of Baghdad, leaving 24 dead. The turmoil has raised fears that the country is caught in a perilous cycle with no functioning government and no common ground to make one.</p> <p>Although political turmoil and street protests are common in Iraq, this round of violence laid bare the risks of a potent mix of political paralysis, the decay of state institutions, and the escalating rivalries between Shiite groups that are backed by Iran and a more Iraqi nationalist faction led by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.</p> <p>The violence began on Monday, after Mr. Sadr declared in a tweet that he was quitting Iraqi politics. His followers stormed the Green Zone — the heavily guarded district that is home to Iraqi government offices, the United Nations and diplomatic missions including the U.S. Embassy — and ransacked government buildings.</p> <p>After those supporters came under fire from government security forces, who included members of Iran-backed militias that Mr. Sadr opposes, Sadrist fighters armed with rifles and rocket-propelled grenades emerged to take on the security forces.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Mr. Sadr sought to defuse the hostility just as suddenly as it had flared, calling on his followers to stand down and leave the Green Zone.</p> <p>Though it was short-lived, the eruption of deadly clashes left some Iraqis shaken by the fear that the country might once again be descending into the cycle of seemingly endless factional violence that has plagued their country over the past two decades.</p> <p>Following the U.S. invasion in 2003, a sectarian civil war between Shiite and Sunni hard-line factions broke out and raged for years.</p> <p>Then there was a yearslong battle by Iraqi security forces, aided by Shiite militias loyal to Iran and Kurdish fighters from northern Iraq, to drive out the Islamic State after the Sunni terrorist group took over large parts of the country.</p> <p>In recent years, rivalries among Shiites have become the main driver of Iraqi political instability.</p> <p>Iran-backed Shiite militias formed in 2014 to fight Islamic State have become a permanent part of Iraqi government security forces, with some more answerable to Iran's Shiite theocracy than to the Iraqi government.</p> <p>Mr. Sadr is the leader of a rival Shiite opposition. And his political movement has been fueled in part by lingering distrust of Iran that was born in the devastating war between the neighboring countries in the 1980s and was shaped by years of Iranian manipulation and intervention in Iraq's affairs.</p> <p>Elections last year in October were seen as a fresh start for the country — a response to massive protests against a corrupt and dysfunctional government. Instead they led to the current political deadlock.</p> <p>Mr. Sadr, appearing at a news conference on Tuesday in Najaf, a southern city holy to Shiite Muslims worldwide, called on his supporters to withdraw immediately from the Green Zone, where the fighting over the past two days has been focused. He said he was sorry about what had happened.</p>

“Regardless of who started the sedition yesterday,” he said, referring to the violent clashes, “I say that my head is down and I apologize to the Iraqi people.”

Mr. Sadr added that anyone who did not comply with his order would be considered no longer loyal to him. He also called on supporters to dismantle protest camps they had maintained for weeks, including around Parliament.

Witnesses and Iraqi security officials confirmed that shooting had stopped in the Green Zone soon after that and that Sadr militia members and other supporters were withdrawing, some carrying guns and others holding tents they had used in sit-ins.

A road passing through the Green Zone bore evidence of the fighting: palm trees riddled with shrapnel and unexploded shells, according to witnesses.

Iraq’s prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, praised Mr. Sadr’s call for withdrawal as showing “the highest level of patriotism.”

Baghdad began Tuesday under its second straight day of strict curfew. But after Mr. Sadr’s announcement, Iraqi security commanders said they were lifting the curfew in the capital and in all the other parts of Iraq where it was in place.

Iraq’s political evolution over the past two decades is a far cry from U.S. ambitions of instilling a multisectarian and multiethnic democracy when it led an invasion to topple the country’s longtime dictator, Saddam Hussein, in 2003.

The governments that rose up in Saddam’s wake were led by Iraqi expatriates the United States had put in place, and they implemented a system of awarding leadership positions based on ethnic or religious background. That system has devolved into ministries being given to specific political parties, many of which have drained them through endemic corruption.

U.S. occupation authorities also disbanded the Iraqi Army, leaving a considerable security vacuum that Mr. Sadr stepped into when he raised a militia that fought U.S. forces in Baghdad and across the south. He later disbanded that militia and renounced violence after fighting new Iraqi government security forces for control of the city of Basra in Iraq’s Shiite-dominated south.

Mr. Sadr comes from a revered Shiite family of clerics and commands millions of followers in Iraq. His bloc won more seats than any other single party in Parliament in the October election, and he had tried in vain for months to form a coalition government with other partners after the elections. Frustrated over the failure, he urged his followers into the streets instead to achieve their aims.

The clashes over the past day mainly pitted Iran-backed paramilitary units that are part of Iraqi government security forces against armed members of Mr. Sadr’s paramilitary organization, the so-called Peace Brigades, attacking each other’s positions and offices, according to Sajad Jiyad, an Iraq-based fellow with the Century Foundation.

A senior Iraqi security official said some of those killed on Monday had been shot by pro-Iran militia members who are part of Iraqi security forces as they approached the home of former Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, who is closely tied to Iran. The official asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Neighboring Iran, which has exerted extensive efforts over the past several years to bring Shiite factions in Iraq closer together, reacted with alarm to the fighting, closing its borders with Iraq and telling Iranians it would work to bring them home safely.

	<p>Mr. Sadr holds no formal political office but remains one of the most powerful political forces in Iraq. His influence derives from the legacy of his father and uncle, who were senior religious scholars revered by millions.</p> <p>Religious factors closely entwined with politics and power seemed to have underpinned Mr. Sadr's announcement on Monday that he was quitting politics for good.</p> <p>Mr. Sadr's father, who was assassinated in Iraq in 1999, was a grand ayatollah — one of the most senior Shiite religious authorities, based in Najaf. One of the divides in the Shiite world separates those who pledge allegiance to the top religious scholars in Najaf or in the Iranian holy city of Qom, its theological rival.</p> <p>One of the big differences between the two is that the Qom religious leadership places religious authorities above the authority of the state — as is the case in Iran's theocracy.</p> <p>Iraqi and Iranian analysts said they saw Mr. Sadr's decision to leave politics this week as connected to an announcement on Monday from Qom by a successor to his father, Grand Ayatollah Kadhém al-Haeri, who said he was retiring from his position and directed his followers to transfer allegiance to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.</p> <p>Ayatollah al-Haeri said that Mr. Sadr's actions in the past had risked tearing apart the Shiite community and Iraq, and that he was not worthy of the name Sadr.</p> <p>His pronouncement was delivered from Qom and was seen as a blow to Mr. Sadr's influence among some followers as well as to Najaf, where Mr. Sadr lives.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Putin eyes undoing Gorbachev legacy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/world/europe/putin-gorbachev-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>The day that Russia invaded Ukraine, Feb. 24, the legacy of Mikhail S. Gorbachev loomed over President Vladimir V. Putin's predawn speech.</p> <p>"The paralysis of power and will is the first step toward complete degradation and oblivion," Mr. Putin intoned, referring to the Soviet Union's collapse. "We lost confidence for only one moment, but it was enough to disrupt the balance of forces in the world."</p> <p>For Mr. Putin, the end of the Soviet Union was the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," a "genuine tragedy" for millions of Russians because it left them scattered across newly formed national borders. The disaster was caused, in Mr. Putin's telling, by the weak nerves of a leader too willing to bend to the demands of a treacherous and duplicitous West — a mistake, the Kremlin's televised propaganda now often reminds viewers, that Mr. Putin is determined not to repeat.</p> <p>In Ukraine, Mr. Putin is fighting in the shadows of the empire whose end Mr. Gorbachev presided over, having started a war that has killed thousands in the name of restoring Moscow's dominance over what the Kremlin claims to be Russian lands. But Mr. Putin's battle to reverse Mr. Gorbachev's legacy extends beyond territorial control to the personal and political freedoms that the last Soviet president ushered in — and that the Kremlin is now fast reversing.</p> <p>"All of Gorbachev's reforms are now zero, in ashes, in smoke," a friend of his, the radio journalist Aleksei A. Venediktov, said in a July interview. "This was his life's work."</p> <p>Mr. Gorbachev was still in power when Mr. Venediktov's freewheeling liberal radio station, Echo of Moscow, first went on the air in 1990 and came to symbolize Russia's newfound freedoms. After Mr. Putin ordered troops into Ukraine in February, the Kremlin forced the radio station to shut down.</p>

Return to Top	<p>And Novaya Gazeta — the independent newspaper that Mr. Gorbachev used his Nobel Peace Prize money to help found in the early 1990s — was forced to suspend publication in March, threatened by a new wartime censorship law.</p> <p>Mr. Gorbachev, in ill health, said nothing himself publicly this year about the war in Ukraine. His Gorbachev Foundation, a research institute that “seeks to promote democratic values,” issued a statement two days after the invasion began calling for a “speedy cessation of hostilities” and “the immediate start of peace talks.”</p> <p>But Mr. Gorbachev, the son of a Ukrainian mother and a Russian father, backed Mr. Putin’s view of Ukraine as a “brotherly nation” that should rightfully be in Russia’s orbit. He supported Mr. Putin’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, describing the move as representing the will of the region’s population. And he castigated the West for “trying to draw Ukraine into NATO,” warning that such attempts “will not bring anything but discord between Ukraine and Russia.”</p> <p>But he appeared confident that the worst could be avoided. Asked about tensions between Ukraine and Russia in 2014, he told a Siberian news outlet, “A war between Russia and Ukraine — this is absurd.”</p>
-------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

HEADLINE	08/30 Africa Russian mercenaries target civilians
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/world/africa/wagner-group-civilians-africa.html
GIST	<p>As Russian mercenaries from the private military group Wagner have been operating in Ukraine, their counterparts in Africa have received little scrutiny and have made civilian populations their primary targets, according to a newly released report on their activities in two of the continent’s most fragile countries.</p> <p>In the Central African Republic, Wagner operatives have targeted civilians in more than half of all their operations since 2018, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, or ACLED, a crisis monitoring organization.</p> <p>And in Mali, where Wagner mercenaries have been operating alongside the country’s armed forces since last year, ACLED reported they have targeted civilians in more than 70 percent of their activities, leading to a spike in civilian deaths that analysts say could fuel the ranks of Islamist insurgents.</p> <p>ACLED said it established a data set of political violence in the two African countries based on eyewitness accounts, and reports from human rights groups, news organizations and national authorities.</p> <p>In the Central African Republic, for instance, it recorded 180 attacks on civilians involving Wagner mercenaries since late 2020, accounting for 52 percent of the group’s operations in the country.</p> <p>The Wagner Group, a network that combines military force with commercial and strategic interests, has been active in Mali, Central African Republic, Mozambique and Libya, allying with leaders and militia commanders who can pay for their services. The Kremlin denies any link to Wagner, but American and European officials say it is an unofficial tool of Russian power.</p> <p>In Mali and the Central African Republic, the levels of violence committed by Russian mercenaries now exceed civilian targeting by state forces, rebel groups or Islamist insurgents, ACLED said.</p> <p>“Put it simply, Wagner has been bad news for civilians,” said Héní Nsaibia, a researcher with ACLED focusing on Mali, and one of the authors of the new report on the group’s activities in the two countries. “They have played a central role in this escalation and increase of fatalities.”</p> <p>The new data complement a growing body of evidence gathered by the United Nations, research institutes and news organizations documenting widespread looting, torture and indiscriminate killings in Africa by the group.</p>

Hundreds of Wagner fighters have been [fighting in Ukraine](#), and earlier this month [Ukraine claimed to have to hit a base](#) occupied by the shadowy group.

In the Central African Republic, Wagner fighters have been the main source of violence since late 2020, according to ACLED, even as the military has regained control of most territories that had been in the hands of rebel groups.

In Mali, where a military junta has been fighting insurgents affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, Wagner mercenaries have been involved in the deaths of more than 500 civilians this year, driving casualties that in the first six months of 2022 have already outnumbered last year's civilian deaths, according to [ACLED](#).

In March, Malian soldiers and Russian operatives [looted houses and executed hundreds of men](#) in the village of Moura, before forcing locals to burn bodies in mass graves, according to a New York Times investigation.

Smaller-scale versions of the Moura massacre have occurred in other areas of central and western Mali. Also in March, "white-skinned soldiers" rounded up all adult men in a locality near the border with Mauritania, according to a confidential U.N. report seen by The Times. Malian armed forces later joined them, and the bodies of 33 men who had been arrested were found burned, the report said.

Now Wagner fighters are also targeting civilians in operations carried out without the Malian military, according to ACLED, reproducing a pattern seen in the Central African Republic.

The Malian authorities have repeatedly dismissed allegations of human rights abuses as part of a disinformation campaign and have denied the presence of Wagner in the country, even as Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov [confirmed it earlier this year](#).

Mali's close cooperation with Russia has jeopardized the presence of Western troops, with [France ending a nine-year military operation](#) in the country earlier this month.

A few days earlier, Germany had announced that it was suspending most of its military participation to the United Nations' peacekeeping operation in Mali.

Still, the German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock told reporters in Morocco last week, "We must not abandon Mali and above all we must not abandon it to Russia."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Solomon Is. halts foreign military ships visit
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/us/politics/solomon-islands-us-military-china.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Solomon Islands has suspended visits by U.S. and other foreign military vessels, American officials said Tuesday, raising concerns in Washington that the Pacific nation is turning away from engagement with the United States in favor of working with China.</p> <p>The Solomon Islands gave notice of the decision after a U.S. Coast Guard ship and a British Royal Naval ship failed to get timely approvals last week to make routine stops in a port.</p> <p>The Solomon Islands government formally notified the United States on Monday that it had placed a moratorium on all foreign military ship visits pending a review of protocols and procedures, Vedant Patel, a deputy spokesman for the State Department, said Tuesday.</p> <p>The move appeared to be a rebuke of the United States, which has sent top officials to the Solomon Islands in recent months to strengthen relations.</p>

Mr. Patel said he did not have information on whether China had suggested the suspension or if the Chinese navy had recently visited the country.

Documents leaked in March [revealed](#) that the administration of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and Chinese officials had signed a secret security agreement that would allow the Solomon Islands to call on China to send military and security forces to the country if needed. Terms of the agreement said the deal was to remain secret, but opponents of it shared copies of a draft online. The Australian government, which sees the Pacific islands as within its sphere of influence, verified the authenticity of the documents.

Some analysts said the agreement could open the way for Chinese troops and naval ships to establish a presence in the Solomon Islands, which played a pivotal role in World War II. In August 1942, American-led forces and the Japanese military began fighting an intense six-month series of battles in and around Guadalcanal, the country's main island. About 7,000 American troops died, but the U.S. military triumphed, which paved the way for its efforts to retake the Philippines and attack the islands of Japan.

National security officials in both the Trump and Biden administrations have feared that China would gain a foothold in the Solomon Islands and cut off the U.S. Navy's ability to project power and support partners and allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Coast Guard vessel, the Oliver Henry, had to divert to Papua New Guinea after the Solomon Islands failed to respond to a request to dock for a routine refueling stop, U.S. officials say.

The vessel had been in the region as part of operations coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency to monitor illegal or unregulated fishing. The British naval ship that was not given timely approval, the H.M.S. Spey, was involved in the same operation.

"It's disappointing that the Oliver Henry was not provided diplomatic clearance in support of this operation," Mr. Patel said.

Mr. Sogavare [issued a statement](#) on Tuesday saying there had been delays in information sharing and asking other nations to "give us time to review, and put in place our new processes, before sending further requests for military vessels to enter the country."

A Pentagon official said U.S. diplomats in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, had been in touch with counterparts in the government there about ship visit procedures and requisite clearances.

Charles Edel, Australia chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former State Department official, said a denial of a visit by a U.S. military vessel was not in itself a significant concern.

But "given the larger context of Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sogavare's recent signing of a secretive security agreement with China, his acceptance of a bid from Huawei to build cell towers in the Solomon Islands and his increasing reluctance to cooperate with the U.S. and Australia, this decision reflects a concerning trend," he said.

"These indications suggest that Sogavare is increasingly looking to bring the Solomon Islands closer to China, and further away from the U.S., Australia and the rest of the Pacific Island community," Mr. Edel added.

The United States has scrambled to try to blunt China's influence in the Solomon Islands. In early August, Wendy R. Sherman, the deputy secretary of state, and Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Australia, took part in a ceremony there that marked the 80th anniversary of the Guadalcanal battles. Both their fathers were wounded in the fighting.

In April, Kurt Campbell, the top official on Asia policy in the White House, and Daniel Kritenbrink, the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, were in a U.S. delegation that traveled to the Solomon Islands in part [to warn](#) Mr. Sogavare about his security agreement with China.

In February, Antony J. Blinken, the U.S. secretary of state, [announced during a visit](#) to Fiji that the United States planned to reopen its embassy in the Solomon Islands after a closure of 29 years.

In 2019, Mr. Sogavare [cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan](#), the self-governing, democratic island that Chinese leaders want to bring under their rule, and established formal relations with China. But he has insisted his nation does not intend to host a Chinese naval base.

Last year, anti-China sentiments contributed to [deadly protests and riots](#) against Mr. Sogavare in Honiara. People burned and looted stores in the Chinatown area of the capital, and three bodies were found in one building there.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Power shortage: China rations electricity
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/its-getting-extremely-hard-climate-crisis-forces-china-to-ration-electricity
GIST	<p>There were still some streetlights on the Bund, one of the main roads in central Shanghai. But the decorative lights which light up the city skyline – blue, pink, and red – were turned off for two days to cope with the peaking power demand.</p> <p>The power restriction imposed by the city authorities, was the first in Shanghai, the financial hub of China. But across the rest of the country similar restrictions have been put in place, as cities, notably in the south-western region, grapple with ongoing power shortages caused by devastating droughts this summer.</p> <p>In Sichuan, a top-level energy emergency alert was issued to address the province’s power shortages, a first in the province’s history: the alert means that residents will be given priority for power supplies. Sichuan is known for its abundant hydro energy, which provides 80% of its power, and is a vital link in China’s extensive West-to-East Electricity Transfer Project.</p> <p>But the area has been hit by record-breaking high temperatures, unseen in 60 years. With water in the region’s rivers dropping to historical lows, hydropower plants are only producing half the energy they were generating this time last year.</p> <p>Sichuan had already imposed rolling blackouts across factories, and international companies have had to halt production, while the coal-fired plants are all at full stretch.</p> <p>But even so, cities around Sichuan are struggling to meet surging power demands from residential communities, with people’s daily lives being heavily affected. In Dazhou, residents in one community complain that power supplies have been cut for 6-7 hours each day for nearly a week, leaving many flocking to a nearby bridge in the evening to beat the sweltering summer heat, according to Jiupai News.</p> <p>Private business owners are also hit hard as power supplies are rationed among communities and shopping malls. In Chengdu, a restaurant owner complained on China’s equivalent of TikTok, Douyin, saying: “It’s getting extremely hard for us in the food and beverage industry this year. We barely made it through the Covid restrictions earlier this year and now we’re being hit by a power shortage.”</p> <p>“We’ve been eagerly looking forward to July and August, which are usually the high season for us, but it all seems to be just a pipe dream now.”</p> <p>The disruptions are being felt all over the country, with cross-regional business activities and supply chains being hit in various ways. The price of commodities such as silicon metal has risen due to the</p>

power restrictions, and there are growing concerns about a shortage of automobile parts in Shanghai for companies including the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation and Tesla.

Meanwhile, cities including Chongqing, Luzhou in Sichuan and Chishui in Guizhou, all in the greater southwestern part of China, are also battling forest fires caused by lack of rain and extreme heat.

In Chongqing alone, between 18 and 21 August, [at least five forest fires](#) have been reported in districts including Jiangjin, Dazu, Tongliang, Ba'nian and Nanchuan, adding more woes to the already-strained government.

The droughts have also been causing problems for farmers, with a shortage of drinking water among nearly 200,000 livestock across farms in Sichuan. About 433,000 hectares (1,069,966 acres) of crops have been affected by the water shortages, with the resulting direct economic loss amounting to 3.5bn yuan, according to data released by Sichuan's emergency management authorities.

Like China, countries in the northern hemisphere are experiencing unprecedented heatwaves and droughts this year, which reminds the world once again the stark reality of climate change.

Riding the tides of the current crisis, calls for more awareness of this immense global challenge are rising on Chinese social media. On Twitter-like social media platform Weibo, one hashtag going as "Help Earth Reduce 1°C", which was initiated by the Chinese NEV giant BYD, has gained more than 120m views.

In its description, the company calls upon the public to pay more attention to global warming. The hashtag has since been reposted by state-run-media accounts including The People's Daily and Xinhua news agency.

Others warn that extreme weather is likely to remain a commonplace occurrence in the near future, calling for concerted efforts across industries in order to cope with it effectively.

"Around the globe, extreme weather with high and even super-high temperatures will likely occur frequently in the coming decade or for a longer period of time in the future. Judging by the situation this year, I don't think people have got the full picture of how big an impact such weather can have on our production activities and our lives." Xu Xiaofeng, former deputy director of the China Meteorological Administration, said in an interview with National Business Daily.

"Only by strengthening coordination among various industries and deepening our knowledge about climate change can we come up with effective coping measures."

Yet, with Sichuan setting an example of resorting to coal-fired power as an immediate solution amid the current power crisis, it remains to be seen how China will strike a balance between ensuring normal use of power and reaching its carbon neutral goal by 2060.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Baghdad faces fighting, city grinds to a halt
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/iraq-baghdad-residents-wait-out-fighting-as-city-grounds-to-halt
GIST	<p>As night fell over Baghdad on Monday, many Iraqis wondered whether their country would wake up to a new civil war. Much of the city stayed up sleepless, listening to the sound of heavy machine gun fire, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades that echoed across the deserted streets.</p> <p>"The air conditioner was blasting away, but we still couldn't sleep. It was as if we were on a battlefield," said Dina al-Saadi, a university professor who lives in a neighbourhood near the heaviest fighting.</p> <p>Iraq has been on a collision course for months. After deepening political tensions between rival Shia parties paralysed the formation of a new government, the struggle for power spilled on to the streets as</p>

heavy fighting erupted between supporters of populist Shia [cleric Muqtada al-Sadr](#) and Iran-aligned groups in the heart of the green zone, an ultra-secure area home to embassies and government institutions.

The clashes roused memories of the deadly chaos that engulfed Baghdad's streets in the wake of the 2003 invasion, stoking fears of renewed violence. "You immediately think back to 2004," Saadi said. "There is no security, there is no protection, there is no state. Who will protect us?"

Almost 20 years after the US invasion, Iraq is still struggling to find peace. The latest crisis has once again laid bare the weakness of its institutions and the fragility of the post-2003 political order.

At the heart of the conflict is a struggle for power between the country's elites. Since 2003, Iraq has been ruled by consensus, with ministerial positions divided among Shia, Sunni and Kurdish parties through a sectarian power-sharing formula that ensured equitable access to resources. But the practice has institutionalised corruption and hollowed out a once functioning bureaucracy that is now unable to deliver the most basic services.

Mass protests erupted in 2019, calling for an overhaul of the political system. In response, the government held early elections in October last year. But rather than paving the way for change, the vote brought a new crisis.

Sadr emerged victorious and, claiming to want reform, tried to form a majority government without his Iran-aligned Shia opponents. His rivals saw the move as a power grab, while many Iraqis blame both sides for bickering over government posts at the expense of ordinary citizens.

"They are all just looking out for their own interests. None of them are thinking about Iraq," said Saadi, rattling off a list of grievances including the dilapidated state of Iraq's infrastructure and the declining quality of higher education.

The clashes began moments after Sadr announced his withdrawal from politics on Monday, effectively giving his supporters carte blanche to vent their anger. Sadr's devout base consists of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who hail from the poorest segments of society, but he also commands a militia called Saraya al-Salam. On the opposing side are powerful armed wings of Iran-aligned parties, most notably Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq.

Staccato machine gun fire, interspersed with deep thuds of rocket-propelled-grenades, continued to ring out in central Baghdad on Tuesday. Security forces were stationed on major streets, but they did not seem to intervene in the clashes between the rival Shia forces, who had set up positions at opposing sides of the green zone.

"We are fighting the corrupt militias while the government security forces are watching," said the Sadr supporter Abbas Ali as smoke filled the sky in the distance.

There was an eerie routine to the chaos. Neighbourhoods had been sealed off with concrete barriers to enforce the curfew, with bored soldiers checking ID cards to make sure only residents were allowed through. Streets that would usually be clogged with traffic were nearly empty, except for vehicles ferrying young men to the frontlines.

"People are used to this," said the bystander Rashwan Fouad as he lit a cigarette. "Iraq has been through so much. This is nothing but a snapshot in our history."

Commercial life had meanwhile ground to a halt, with only a few shops open for business in a country where most people subsist on daily wages. "We just want to live. Everyone has a family, everyone has rent to pay," said Abdallah, a shopkeeper and father of three who had defied the curfew in hopes of earning a living. His usual commute of 20 minutes had taken him two hours on foot.

	As he spoke, the television in the corner began airing a live press conference, in which Sadr condemned the violence. The cleric's reconciliatory tone appeared to signal a path towards de-escalation. "Thank God," said Abdalla, breathing a sigh of relief. "We just want a peaceful solution."
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/29 Seattle firefighter logs 130hrs OT in a week
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/behind-seattle-fires-record-overtime-staffing-shortfalls-lead-to-extreme-hours/
GIST	<p>Last Christmas Eve, Seattle firefighter Daniel Kieta clocked in to work a 24-hour shift. He worked another 24 hours the next day, and after a day's rest, put in a second 48-hour shift, logging 130 hours — all overtime — in the final week of the year.</p> <p>It was the most extreme week for Kieta, who worked the most hours of any city employee last year. But it was not an anomaly for the 51-year-old firefighter, or for the Seattle Fire Department.</p> <p>SFD paid out \$37.7 million in overtime last year, a 49% increase over 2019 and the most in department history, as it grappled with an uptick in emergencies, shouldered a broader workload and lost firefighters. The department says "unprecedented staffing shortages" are continuing.</p> <p>SFD responded to more calls last year with fewer staff than in 2019, a 6% increase in the number of responses per firefighter. The department's uniformed staff slipped to 965 in June — the lowest level going back to at least 2001, department records show — before rebounding with new hires.</p> <p>Citywide, ranked by the number of hours they were paid to work, the top 30 city employees were all firefighters. The top 10 worked more than 4,000 hours — equivalent to working two years of 40-hour work weeks within the span of one year — while Kieta logged more than 4,900 hours, making him the 15th highest-paid city employee at \$341,410. The highest wage earner was fire Capt. Rory Dees, 64, who put in more than 4,300 hours and grossed \$405,020.</p> <p>"We do have concerns all the time about individuals working too much overtime, too many hours in a row," Harold Scoggins, the fire department's chief, said in an interview. "We won't be able to solve this until we can get our staffing all the way full," he said, adding that he is "incredibly proud" of firefighters who have stepped up to work overtime</p> <p>The greater workload doesn't appear to have contributed to slower response times or a higher rate of injury, according to department data. But at times last year, the department did not meet staffing minimums and couldn't operate some fire engines or other units, Scoggins said. On three days in December, staffing was so low at a station in Beacon Hill that it placed its engine out of service and only a battalion chief was available to respond.</p> <p>The department did not make Kieta or Dees available for interviews for this story.</p> <p>"I have continued to go above and beyond to fulfill my duty as a public servant for the Seattle community during a time where it's been needed most," Dees said in a statement, adding that it hasn't been easy on his family. "For all of us who have worked overtime, I think I speak collectively in that we feel we have made a positive difference by helping to respond to our residents' fire and medical emergencies."</p> <p>Much of the increased overtime has been driven by COVID-19. SFD staffers provided more than 230,000 vaccines last year, at sites from pop-up clinics to Mariners and Sounders games, and administered more than 250,000 tests.</p> <p>The department has had to plug gaps resulting from the dozens of firefighters who left the department or took leave in the fourth quarter of 2021 because they did not comply with the city's vaccine requirement.</p>

According to SFD, 44 firefighters retired, 10 resigned and 21 were fired from the department in the nine months following the announcement of the vaccine requirement. As of May, another 19 were on extended leave from the department, seeking exemptions from the policy.

While the department does not have data on why each firefighter left, a spokesperson said “there is one retirement that clearly related to the mandate,” and that “some additional retirements may have occurred in response to the mandate, although the retirees did not explicitly state such reason.”

Other temporary stressors — like a six-person team staffing a truck and medic unit added in West Seattle in June 2020 to respond to emergencies during the closure of the West Seattle Bridge — contributed to the number of hours worked. But the department is also understaffed for its daily operations.

At different points throughout the day, SFD requires between 216 and 220 uniformed personnel to be on duty in order to meet minimum staffing requirements. The department says it needs 1,083 personnel in total to meet full staffing.

As of this month, SFD said it had 1,026 uniformed staff, or 57 positions shy of full staffing. The department said they’ve met minimum staffing requirements just 32% of the time since the beginning of the year. On days when SFD is understaffed, anywhere from one to “a few” of the department’s 69 apparatuses can be out of service, according to a spokesperson.

“As a result of normal and expected retirements and the failure of the department to hire enough fire fighters over the last few years, the Seattle Fire Department is extremely understaffed,” International Association of Fire Fighters Local 27 President Kenny Stuart said in a written statement.

“On a daily basis our firefighters and paramedics are being asked to work extra shifts to cover these vacancies to ensure that the people of Seattle are protected at all times, and they are doing just that,” he added.

Before Scoggins took over as chief in 2015, the department intentionally kept open some vacancies, believing that it was more cost-effective to the city to have firefighters work overtime than bringing on more full-time employees. Overtime pay can also have longer-term [financial consequences](#), as it is included in firefighters’ [compensation](#) that counts toward their pensions.

After more than a decade of hiring an average of 25 recruits a year, the department has expanded its hiring in recent years. SFD has hired 124 recruits this year, though the new hires must attend a 15-plus-week academy and complete a nine-month probationary period before they become sworn firefighters.

According to Scoggins, there is no shortage of prospective recruits applying, but the department has struggled to grow the academies to train larger class sizes and keep up with the number of firefighters quitting or retiring from the department.

“We are an organization in transition from one generation to the next,” Scoggins said, noting that the department has hired around 400 new firefighters in his seven years as chief.

Department and union officials are projecting severe staff shortages for months to come. In July, SFD and the union agreed to a temporary plan to deal with the shortages, including allowing probationary employees to work overtime under certain conditions and firefighters to work 72-hour shifts.

Generally, firefighters must have 24 hours of rest before and after they work a 48-hour shift where they are responding to emergencies, according to SFD.

A Seattle Times analysis of overtime data found that 10 firefighters worked 48-hour shifts without 24 hours off on 36 occasions last year. In reviewing those instances, the department determined that most of those shifts were allowable because firefighters were working “non-operations overtime,” such as sporting

events or administering vaccines. SFD said Kieta's shifts likely violated the rule on four occasions, which it hadn't been aware of previously.

SFD has faced similar staffing numbers in the last decade. In 2014, the department reported slightly fewer uniformed staff than in 2021, though it also responded to fewer calls. The department reached its busiest period in 2016, when it responded to more than 97,000 emergencies — which worked out to a rate of responses per firefighter slightly higher than last year.

A department spokesperson pointed to a range of changes in recent years, such as city policies increasing employee leave and staffing for more special events like Kraken hockey games. SFD also launched the Health One program, which is staffed by firefighters, to respond to calls that could involve medical or mental health needs but aren't full-fledged emergencies.

For some firefighters, working at a busy station is a kind of badge of honor. Station 25 in Capitol Hill, which traces its roots to the department's charter in 1889, is home to Aid Car 25 — the ambulance that responds to more calls than any other unit in the city.

A25, as it is known, responded to 5,272 calls last year, up 12% from 2020, an average of more than 14 emergencies a day. The ambulance is parked underneath a disco ball, a whimsical nod to the neighborhood's vibrant nightlife and the station's around-the-clock work.

Firefighters there are often rushing out before the fire bell sounds, attuned to listen for a faint click that happens a split-second before the emergency lights switch on.

"We've always been one of the busiest houses in the city, and we'll always be busy," said Tobin Graves, a lieutenant who has worked at the station since 1999. "Years ago..." he said, beginning a sentence he never finished as he rushed out the door to a call.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Seattle teachers union eyes strike vote
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/seattle-schools-education-union-to-vote-on-a-strike-authorization/
GIST	<p>The Seattle Education Association's board of directors is recommending that its members authorize a strike, a vote that could happen this week.</p> <p>A strike authorization does not mean a strike will happen, but it gives the union's leaders the power to call one if the union and the school district cannot come to an agreement at the bargaining table.</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools and the union, which has about 6,000 members, have been in negotiations since June, district officials said. SEA is focused on higher pay, as well as changing the special education and multilingual program models.</p> <p>"The SEA board of directors did not make this decision lightly," said Jennifer Matter, union president. "I think the SEA board of directors saw that the choice is to either accept what the district has been offering, which is basically lack of student support, lack of workload release, and lack of respectful wages, or stand united for what we know students and educators need."</p> <p>The Seattle contract expires Friday, and the first day of school is Sept. 7. If SEA and Seattle Schools can't come to an agreement before school starts, educators could strike. SEA has a membership meeting Wednesday night and voting on the strike could begin as early as Thursday, Matter said.</p> <p>In an email to families, SPS said negotiations about the special education and multilingual programs have caused delays.</p>

The decision to seek a strike authorization came as a strike in the Kent School District entered its second week. Teachers in King County’s third-largest school district are calling for higher pay and a manageable caseload for staff working with English learners and students in special education.

According to the email sent to families by SPS, the district’s proposal includes salary increases, additional social workers at high schools and middle schools, a more inclusive special education program and training for staff, and staff support for students who are multilingual based on students’ needs per school, professional development for educators. SPS is also proposing to maintain staff levels and minimize disruptions during holiday breaks.

“The SPS proposals outline a plan that is aligned to our district’s instructional philosophy that puts students first, creates inclusive learning spaces, and provides educators and staff with generous compensation, including professional development, career opportunities and benefits,” said Beverly Redmond, spokesperson for the district.

The goal for the union and district is to make the special education program more inclusive, Matter said. SEA is pushing for students receiving special education services to spend more time in general education classrooms, but she said that takes more staff — something the district doesn’t currently have. SEA wants to include teacher-to-student ratios in the contract, Matter said, and the district disagrees.

“We are committed to improving the levels of service and inclusion for students receiving special education, by focusing on student needs rather than fixed staff ratios,” a statement on the district’s website says. “We importantly want to increase training for teachers, so they can effectively integrate special education students in their classrooms.”

Education for multilingual and English learners is also up for negotiation. Currently, students who need these supports have to go to specific schools that provide language services. SEA’s goal is for English learner and multilingual services to be expanded to more schools so students who need these services can attend their neighborhood schools.

Matter said the union is also negotiating for competitive pay and livable wages for teachers living in Seattle. Under the current contract, Seattle teachers make base pay that ranges between \$63,000 and \$123,000, depending on experience and degrees held. The last Seattle teachers strike took place in 2015. In 2018, the union also voted to authorize a strike, but the contract was settled amicably.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Labor Day weekend traffic is coming
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/what-to-know-about-wa-labor-day-weekend-traffic/
GIST	<p>What’s the absolute best way to avoid Labor Day weekend congestion?</p> <p>Leave Thursday and come back Tuesday, according to Washington State Department of Transportation spokesperson Tom Pearce.</p> <p>Of course, that’s not possible for most, he acknowledged.</p> <p>For those of us who have to work on Friday and be back home by Monday night, some traffic is almost inevitable.</p> <p>Labor Day weekend is one of the busiest for travelers hoping to enjoy at least one more weekend of summer fun, according to the transportation department. The busiest times are expected Friday afternoon and evening for people leaving the Seattle area and much of the day Monday for those returning, Pearce said.</p> <p>“Depending on where you are coming from, we expect to see it build by midday on Monday and last well into evening,” he said. For people with fewer travel time options, pack patience and expect some traffic.</p>

	<p>All forms of travel, including trips in cars, planes and trains, are up 22% domestically over last year, according to AAA Washington's public affairs manager Kelly Just. And for the coming weekend, Seattle is expected to be the number one travel destination nationwide, she said.</p> <p>Seattle was the second most popular American destination over the Memorial Day and Independence Day holiday weekends, second only to Orlando, Just said.</p> <p>The biggest impacts, according to WSDOT, are expected on I-90 and at the ferry docks.</p> <p>WSDOT has charts on predicted travel impacts on I-5 between Lacey and Olympia, on I-90 between North Bend and Cle Elum and on Highway 2 between Stevens Pass and Skykomish. The charts are available at st.news/longweekendtraffic</p> <p>If you're traveling by ferry, remember some routes are operating with fewer vessels than usual, so be prepared to wait in line if traveling at peak times. Schedules are available at st.news/ferries</p> <p>Unlike last weekend, when multiple lanes of I-5 and a portion of Highway 520 were closed for construction, there are no work projects planned for the Greater Seattle area this coming weekend, Pearce said. If you encounter collisions or emergency work zones along your path, slow down, he said.</p> <p>"People will be out there working to fix things and clear the roads as quickly as possible," he said, "and they need their space."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Seattle ties record most 90-deg. days/year
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/seattle-ties-record-most-90-degree-days/281-75369a87-cecb-42c4-be73-faddb953daad
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle tied its own record for the most 90-degree days in a year on Tuesday.</p> <p>The temperature hit 90 degrees around 3 p.m. at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, according to the National Weather Service (NWS). That makes for the 12th 90-degree day this year.</p> <p>The record for the most 90-degree days in a year in Seattle was originally set in 2015, with 12, according to KING 5 Meteorologist Chris Nunley.</p> <p>The Seattle area had a record six straight days of 90-plus degrees at the end of July. That was the longest stretch of days at that temperature in the 77 years records have been kept.</p> <p>A daily high record was broken in Olympia and Shelton. In Olympia, the high was 91 degrees and the record was 90 in 1987. In Shelton, the high was 94 degrees when the record was 89 degrees in 2003.</p> <p>There is a Heat Advisory in effect until 9 p.m. on Wednesday. It spans from the north near Everett through the southwest interior of western Washington.</p> <p>The high temperatures will pose a risk of heat-related illness. NWS suggests drinking plenty of fluids, staying in an air-conditioned room staying out of the sun and checking up on relatives and neighbors.</p> <p>Temperatures in the high 80s and low 90s are expected to stick around for the rest of the work week. The weekend is expected to bring temperatures in the high 70s and low 80s.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/29 National Cinema Day: \$3 tickets on Sep 3rd
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/national-cinema-day/507-c21f4184-ca16-47ed-9032-2c96808624cb

GIST	<p>NEW YORK — For one day, movie tickets will be just \$3 in the vast majority of American theaters as part of a newly launched “National Cinema Day” to lure moviegoers during a quiet spell at the box office.</p> <p>The Cinema Foundation, a non-profit arm of the National Association of Theater Owners, on Sunday announced that Sept. 3 will be a nationwide discount day in more than 3,000 theaters and on more than 30,000 screens. Major chains, including AMC and Regal Cinemas, are participating, as are all major film studios. In participating theaters, tickets will be no more than \$3 for every showing, in every format.</p> <p>Labor Day weekend is traditionally one of the slowest weekends in theaters. This year, the August lull has been especially acute for exhibitors. Cineworld, which owns Regal Cinemas, cited the scant supply of major new releases in its recent plans to fill for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.</p> <p>But, if successful, National Cinema Day could flood theaters with moviegoers and potentially prompt them to return in the fall. Before each showing, ticket buyers will be shown a sizzle reel of upcoming films from A24, Amazon Studios, Disney, Focus Features, Lionsgate, Neon, Paramount, Sony Pictures Classics, Sony, United Artists Releasing, Universal, and Warner Bros.</p> <p>"After this summer’s record-breaking return to cinemas, we wanted to do something to celebrate moviegoing,” said Jackie Brenneman, Cinema Foundation president, in a statement. “We’re doing it by offering a ‘thank you’ to the moviegoers that made this summer happen, and by offering an extra enticement for those who haven’t made it back yet.”</p> <p>After more than two years of pandemic, movie theaters rebounded significantly over the summer, seeing business return to nearly pre-pandemic levels. Films like “Top Gun: Maverick,” “Minions: Rise of Gru,” “Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness” and “Jurassic World Dominion” pushed the domestic summer box office to \$3.3 billion in ticket sales as of Aug. 21, according to data firm Comscore. That trails 2019 totals by about 20% but exhibitors have had about 30% fewer wide releases this year.</p> <p>Organizers of National Cinema Day described the event as a trial that could become an annual fixture. While some other countries have experimented with a similar day of cheap movie tickets, the initiative is the first of its kind on such a large scale in the U.S.</p> <p>Return to Top</p>
------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

HEADLINE	08/30 Pandemic worsens for the vulnerable
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/covid-pandemic-immunocompromised-old
GIST	<p>In the last few months, Dr Jeannina Smith has seen organ transplant recipients who have been very careful throughout the pandemic venture out for one activity, contract Covid-19 and lose their transplant.</p> <p>“I have been at the bedside of a transplant recipient” who “was very ill and in the hospital, and she got Covid the second time in a healthcare setting”, said Smith, medical director of the infectious disease program at University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics. “She was sobbing because she said, ‘It’s so hard for me to see that people care so little about my life that wearing a mask is too much for them.’”</p> <p>While much of US society has breathed a collective sigh of relief at no longer having to wear a mask in public, that freedom has placed people who are immunocompromised at risk, such as Smith’s patients. Nor are they the only ones. Older adults, the very young and those with long Covid are at greater risk too. So while for many Americans the pandemic increasingly feels over, for others – often the most vulnerable – it rages on.</p> <p>As Smith puts it, “What troubles me as an infectious disease specialist with an interest in public health is the abandonment of the idea that public health exists to protect the most vulnerable.”</p> <p>About 7 million people in the United States are immunocompromised, according to the American Medical Association. That includes people who are organ or stem cell transplant recipients, or who have cancer, certain genetic disorders or take an immunosuppressive medication.</p>

While there are now vaccines and better treatments for Covid and variants that appear to cause less severe disease than earlier ones, people like Smith's patients still face a significant risk of becoming very sick or dying from Covid in part because they take medications that suppress their immune systems, she said.

"The problem is that the vaccination is less potent if you aren't able to make a good immune response and so much of the protection that other people are afforded by vaccination" doesn't protect transplant patients, Smith said.

And when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stopped enforcing a mask mandate for public transportation in April, it made traveling harder for people who are immunocompromised, Smith said. Several of her patients contracted Covid while traveling.

"They have an increasing number of family members who are out and about, exposed and actually having Covid, and it makes them feel, rightly, that they are less able to do the things that they did safely," Smith said.

Older adults also continue to face a greater risk from Covid. Of the more than 146,000 people who have died this year from Covid, 77% were over the age of 65.

"The risk of dying is not as great as it was before we had vaccines – not even close – but this is not a fun virus to get, and if you're in your 80s, for example, you don't really want to get any colds; you don't want to get sick because you have less reserve," said Dr Michael Wasserman, a geriatrician and chair of the Public Policy Committee of the California Association of Long Term Care Medicine.

But older adults must also balance that need for caution with the need for social engagement, which is also important to people's health, Wasserman said.

That's difficult in some senior housing where "the lazy approach to dealing with the health and wellness of older adults is to isolate them, and it takes away their choice", said Wasserman. "We are at a point where this pandemic should not keep older people from socializing."

The key for older adults is getting a second booster of the Covid vaccine, Wasserman said. He also recommends that older adults wear masks when they are indoors around people they don't know.

"I don't want to be alarmist. I think that's the key here. I think people can live their lives," he said. "I'm 63, and I'm doubly boosted, and when I go to the supermarket, I wear my N95" mask.

But wearing a mask can also be taxing on people who are required to do so in their jobs, said Erica Birkley, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience in the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

"It can be a lot more difficult to get a sense of the other person's emotions," said Birkley, who also provides psychotherapy. "We also tend to drink less water or not take as many breaks throughout the day ... We can get into a pattern of essentially being depleted in ways related to having to wear a mask."

The key is ensuring that people can take mask breaks, she said.

It can also be helpful to think about how wearing a mask could benefit others, she said.

"It is usually going to be cathartic for me to think about the possible positive ripple effect for another human being in that room who possibly might be immunocompromised," she said.

People with long Covid also often must contend with a lack of recognition of their disease, said Dr Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, who chairs the department of physical medicine and rehabilitation at University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and founded its Post-Covid Recovery Clinic.

Almost one in five US adults who had Covid continued to have long Covid symptoms in June, [according to the National Center for Health Statistics](#).

[Symptoms include](#) severe fatigue; shortness of breath; heart palpitations; brain fog; and sleep problems.

“Even though yes, we are learning more, we don’t have a biomarker yet. We don’t have definitive treatments,” Gutierrez said. “A lot of people see it as a legitimate disease, and then I’m on social media ... and occasionally people will say, ‘Well, how do you know it’s not just anxiety?’”

A [new Brookings Institution report](#) estimates that between 2 and 4 million people in the United States are out of work due to long Covid. Gutierrez said her patients can only obtain social security disability insurance or employer disability insurance benefits “very infrequently”.

“Everyone was hoping that they would get over it or that time will heal it, and they are just still not feeling that way,” Gutierrez said.

Before contracting Covid in January 2021, Jennifer Ramey spent almost three decades as a cardiology nurse and ran 20 marathons and hiked some of Colorado’s 14,000ft mountains.

“I loved what I did and was a hopeless romantic nurse and loved patient care,” she said.

But she has been out of work since February 2021 and feels exhausted after walking a couple of aisles at the grocery store, she said.

She spent eight months in rehab – some of it inpatient – working with physical, occupational, recreational and speech therapists. While she is now able to again drive, she still must do cognitive workbooks featuring pattern identification and word search exercises.

Ramey also lost her job.

She applied for disability benefits, but the Social Security Administration recently denied her. She plans to appeal. She does not expect that she will be able to return to work as a cardiology nurse.

“I should probably never check defibrillators and pacemakers. Even though I can do it in my head, I know my head is slower than it needs to be for something like that,” said Ramey. “I will never do the things that I loved as a nurse as far as the critical thinking part.”

Still, Gutierrez is encouraged by some of the recent research on long Covid. For example, [a study from](#) a Yale University researcher, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, found that cortisol levels were often lower among long Covid patients as compared to control groups.

That’s important because it could mean they are closer to identifying a biomarker for long Covid, which could lead to treatments and prove to “the naysayers, the insurance companies that this means you have long Covid, or this means you are impacted by long Covid”, Gutierrez said.

Smith, the transplant infectious disease specialist, also said she was hopeful that nasal vaccines under development could help reduce the risk of infection rather than just preventing severe outcomes, which would be helpful for her patients who are more vulnerable to the virus.

But even if that turns out to be the case, Smith remains discouraged by the lack of societal concern for such patients and doesn’t expect that to change.

“I think that the damage to public health is profound,” Smith said. “And in regards to Covid, I think likely permanent.”

HEADLINE	08/30 Canada invokes treaty: keep pipeline open
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/canada-us-pipeline-line-5-treaty
GIST	<p>Canada has once again invoked a longstanding treaty with the US as it seeks to keep a controversial cross-border pipeline open, warning of “significant” economic damage to both countries in the event of a shutdown.</p> <p>Canada’s foreign minister said Line 5, a pipeline operated by Calgary-based Enbridge, was a critical source of energy security.</p> <p>“[A shutdown of the pipeline] would impact energy prices, such as propane for heating homes and the price of gas at the pump. At a time when global inflation is making it hard on families to make ends meet, these are unacceptable outcomes,” the minister, Mélanie Joly, said in a statement.</p> <p>She added that the government worried the “domino effects” of a shutdown could spill into other parts of Canadian economy, and into communities on both sides of the border.</p> <p>Built in 1953, the 645-mile pipeline travels through Michigan and under the Great Lakes to deliver nearly half of the oil needs of Ontario and Quebec, as well as propane for the state of Michigan.</p> <p>The defensive posture from Canada comes as the Bad River Band, an Indigenous tribe in northern Wisconsin, argues that Enbridge no longer has the right to cross its land after its easement expired.</p> <p>The dispute marks the latest front in the battle against a pipeline that Canada has said is vital to its energy needs.</p> <p>The Michigan governor, Gretchen Whitmer, has previously raised fears that a failure in the pipeline could cause catastrophic environmental damage. Enbridge says the pipeline is safe but will build a new tunnel to contain the pipeline underneath the Straits of Mackinac in the Great Lakes. The company has also promised re-routing Line 5 around the Bad River reservation in a bid to resolve the standoff “amicably” – a proposal Canada “strongly” supports, said Joly.</p> <p>One of Canada’s most powerful tools in the fight is a 1977 treaty, ratified by the US Congress, which governs the free flow of oil between Canada and the United States. Both governments intended the deal to be a long-term arrangement and the treaty requires either side give 10 years’ notice to withdraw.</p> <p>Canada last invoked the treaty in November after mediation with Michigan failed, forcing nation-level negotiations.</p> <p>“This treaty ensures the uninterrupted transmission of hydrocarbons – in the case of Line 5, light crude oil and natural gas liquids – from one place in Canada to another, transiting through the United States,” said Joly.</p> <p>Last year, Canada’s natural resources minister said the continued operation of the pipeline was “non-negotiable” and warned that in addition to thousands of job losses, a shutdown would require 800 tanker rail cars and 2,000 trucks each day to move oil.</p> <p>Enbridge says it has never experienced a leak in the underwater section of Line 5. but in the last three years, the pipeline has been struck by boat anchors and cables. And in 2010, a separate Enbridge pipeline spilled 3.2m litres of oil into Michigan’s Kalamazoo River.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Taiwan fires warning shot at China drone
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/taiwan-fires-warning-shots-at-chinese-drone

Taiwan fired warning shots at a Chinese drone that buzzed an offshore islet shortly after President Tsai Ing-wen said she had ordered Taiwan's military to take "strong countermeasures" against what she termed Chinese provocations.

It was the first time warning shots have been fired in such an incident amid a period of heightened tension between China and [Taiwan](#), which Beijing views as its own territory. Taiwan strongly disputes China's sovereignty claims.

The drone headed back to [China](#) after the shots were fired, a military spokesperson said.

Taiwan has complained of Chinese drones repeatedly flying very close to small groups of islands it controls near China's coast, most recently by the Kinmen islands, as part of military drills by Beijing.

China has carried out the exercises around the island [after a visit by the US House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi](#), this month.

Kinmen defence command spokesperson Chang Jung-shun said the live rounds were fired shortly before 6pm (10am GMT) at the drone, which had approached Erdan islet, with flares being used previously. The drone then flew off back to China, he said.

There was no immediate response from China. On Monday, the Chinese foreign ministry dismissed Taiwan's complaints about the drones as nothing "to make a fuss about".

Footage of at least two drone missions showing Taiwanese soldiers at their posts, and in one case throwing rocks at a drone, have circulated widely on Chinese social media.

Speaking earlier on Tuesday, while visiting the armed forces on the Penghu islands, Tsai criticised China for its drone and other "grey zone" warfare activity.

"I want to tell everyone that the more the enemy provokes, the more calm we must be," Tsai told naval officers. "We will not provoke disputes, and we will exercise self-restraint, but it does not mean that we will not counter."

She said she had ordered the defence ministry to take "necessary and strong countermeasures" to defend their airspace. She did not elaborate.

The Kinmen islands are at their closest point just a few hundred metres (yards) from Chinese territory, opposite China's Xiamen and Quanzhou cities.

Officers told reporters accompanying Tsai that warships and fighter jets based at Penghu – which lies in the Taiwan strait closer to Taiwan than China – have been going out armed with live ammunition since China began its exercises this month, though they have not opened fire.

Lee Kuang-ping, the captain of a frigate, said it had regularly traded radio warnings with Chinese warships.

"Sometimes near the drill zone communist Chinese fishing boats appear, and they provocatively say 'hit them, hit them!'" Lee said.

On a Facebook post citing a navy commander in Penghu, Tsai said ships from both sides came as close as 500-600 yards to each other and Taiwan ships "strictly monitored" their Chinese counterparts.

The Chinese military unit responsible for the area adjacent to Taiwan, the People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theatre Command, released on 15 August a video of the Penghu islands, apparently taken by China's air force.

	<p>Taiwan's military termed the video information warfare, accusing China of exaggeration and saying it was not true Chinese forces had come near the islands.</p> <p>Taiwan's armed forces are well-equipped but dwarfed by China's. Tsai has been overseeing a modernisation programme and has made increasing defence spending a priority.</p> <p>Asked about the Chinese drone activities earlier on Tuesday, the Taiwanese defence minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said he could not give details on what they would do to counter the incursions but he said the military would react based on the principle of "self defence".</p> <p>"Don't make a fuss then when I set off some firecrackers to scare away some sparrows," he told reporters in Taipei in a veiled warning to China.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Ukraine claims counteroffensive in south
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/30/ukraine-claims-counteroffensive-south-russia-explained
GIST	<p>How did Ukrainian officials frame the attack in Kherson?</p> <p>At a briefing reported on Monday afternoon, Nataliya Humenyuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command, said an offensive in Kherson, the only regional capital Russia has been able to secure since the war began, was under way. Her comments came after video circulated that apparently showed a soldier from the Russian-run self-proclaimed republic of Donetsk saying Ukrainian forces had broken through.</p> <p>The Guardian's Isobel Koshiw in Kyiv reported comments echoing Humenyuk's last night from Oleksiy Arestovych, a senior adviser to Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Zelenskiy himself did not refer to the attack specifically in his nightly address. But the Ukrainian president said: "The occupiers should know: we will oust them to the border. To our border, the line of which has not changed."</p> <p>Other Ukrainian officials echoed those claims. Sergiy Khlan, a local deputy and adviser to Kherson's regional governor, said it was "the beginning of the end of the occupation of Kherson region" and "a prepared, well-balanced start of a counteroffensive".</p> <p>How do they say it has gone so far?</p> <p>Arestovych said Ukrainian troops were attacking Russian defences along the frontline and claimed they had broken through in several places. He also said ferries on the west bank of the Dnieper River, which are being used to supply Russian forces in the territory, were being shelled.</p> <p>The BBC reported officials in Kyiv claiming that US-supplied Himars rocket systems had been used to destroy three bridges across the Dnieper as well as temporary bridges created by Russian forces. The BBC also said a Ukrainian operational group in the region claimed a Russian-backed regiment had left its positions and Russian paratroopers had fled.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials declined to give details of the attack, citing operational security. But their claims could not be independently corroborated. While witnesses reported blasts in the cities of Kherson and Nova Kakhovka, the extent and success of Ukrainian operations are yet to be confirmed.</p> <p>The Financial Times reported remarks from John Kirby, a US national security spokesperson, who said Ukraine's actions had "already had an impact on Russia's military capabilities" because Moscow had been forced to divert resources to the region from the east of the country.</p> <p>This at-a-glance piece gives a wider picture of the situation in Ukraine this morning, including news of a team of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors en route to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine, where Kyiv claims Russian occupiers are violating nuclear safety protocols.</p> <p>What does Russia say?</p>

Russia's state-owned news agency Ria cited the defence ministry in Moscow as acknowledging that Ukrainian troops attempted an offensive in the southern Mykolaiv and Kherson regions. A senior official in Nova Kakhovka told Ria that civilians had been ordered to take refuge in bomb shelters.

The Russian defence ministry said Ukrainian forces had sustained significant casualties and claimed the "enemy's offensive attempt failed miserably". The FT reported that Sergei Aksyonov, the Moscow-appointed governor of Crimea, said on Telegram that the claimed counterattack was "the latest fake [news] from Ukrainian propaganda" and said Ukraine's forces were "taking extremely severe losses".

Again, it is not yet possible to verify these claims, and Russia routinely inflates the scale of Ukrainian losses in its updates. Recently, western and Ukrainian intelligence have noted a buildup of Russian troops and equipment in the region, potentially suggesting Russia was preparing its own offensive.

What are the prospects of success?

Humenyuk told reporters that Russian forces were strong in the region – and that even though morale was low among their ranks, "it was too early to relax". In comments on his Telegram account reported by the Guardian's Samantha Lock [on the live blog](#), Arestovych characterised the action as "a planned slow operation to grind the enemy" and said: "This process will not be very fast, but will end with the installation of the Ukrainian flag over all the settlements of Ukraine."

Ukraine's ability to conduct its claimed counteroffensive has been greatly enhanced by the provision of weapons by the west, and Russian positions in the region have been under artillery barrage for weeks and cut off from their supply lines.

But it is too early to say whether those successes will translate to victory on the ground. A US official [quoted by the New York Times](#) said the Pentagon "remained cautious about whether Ukraine's current military capabilities were sufficient to make significant gains".

Why is an attack in Kherson significant?

Kherson has huge symbolic and practical significance as the only regional capital to have been secured by the Russian invaders – and if Ukraine can entirely cut off enemy forces on the western bank of the Dnieper, they will have a realistic prospect of success.

That would disrupt Russian attempts to proceed with a sham referendum designed to give credibility to Moscow's claims that residents of Kherson and other parts of southern Ukraine wish to be part of Russia. For more on how that prospect is viewed by citizens in Kherson, read [this piece](#) by Shaun Walker and Pjotr Sauer from earlier this month, in which one interviewee says: "No one thought about [a referendum] before the war. Now it will be a referendum at gunpoint."

There has been a growing sense that if Kyiv is to retake the city, it must do so as a matter of urgency: changing weather – including rain that will make the countryside muddy and far harder for ground troops to traverse – in the autumn means there is a powerful incentive to launch a counteroffensive now. There are also fears European support could fade as the impact of high energy prices begins to take hold.

Success in any operation to take Kherson could break a long period of deadlock – and persuade western allies that it is worth continuing to provide the arms and funding that Ukraine needs. But if an attack fails, Ukrainian morale would be undermined, and Russia's plans to bring the south of the country under its full control would be reinforced.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Europe braces for Russia gas disruption
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-braces-for-russia-gas-disruption-this-weekand-years-of-higher-energy-prices-ahead-11661858795?mod=hp_lead_pos7

Russia is set to shut its key Nord Stream natural-gas pipeline Wednesday for maintenance, leaving Europe guessing again about [whether supplies will restart](#), as temperatures fall and demand for the fuel grows.

Whatever the outcome, European officials and energy executives say the continent faces years of high energy prices and possible shortages as efforts to replace Russian imports clash with limited supplies elsewhere and regulations that discourage hydrocarbon usage.

Due to a drop in consumption this year, Europe is on track to secure enough gas to avoid outright rationing this winter. However, its governments are struggling to secure supplies for next year and beyond, despite wooing top producers from the likes of the U.S., Canada and Qatar.

Even if Nord Stream reopens Saturday as promised by Russian gas giant Gazprom PJSC, few Western politicians and economists think Europe will receive enough Russian natural gas next year because of expectations that the [economic war with Moscow will intensify](#).

Russia's Gazprom will reduce gas deliveries to [Engie](#) SA because of a dispute over contracts, the French multinational utility company said Tuesday, without providing further details. Engie's deliveries of Russian gas, which normally account for about 17% of its yearly supply, has dropped to less than 4%, or a monthly level of 1.5 terawatt hours.

Pipeline gas from other regions besides Russia is flowing at full capacity, leaving the continent relying on liquefied natural gas from farther afield to offset the shortfall. Many experts think it won't be enough, condemning Europe to years of [high energy prices](#) that will dent consumers' budgets, drive energy-intensive companies out of business, and deplete public coffers as governments seek to soften the blow on society.

Europe must brace for five to 10 years of hardship, said Alexander de Croo, the prime minister of Belgium, one of Europe's major importers of LNG.

Faraway gas producers such as Qatar or the U.S. need at least two years to increase production to meet surging European demand. And because many European nations aim to cut fossil gas use in the long term, they have been reluctant to sign the long-term purchase contracts these producers insist on. Some gas-rich nations such as Canada can't boost production because of their own climate-change legislation limiting carbon-dioxide emissions, including a ban on new production in Quebec, which sits on vast reserves.

In the short term, Europeans have acquired LNG on the spot market to meet gas shortages, mostly from Asian buyers who signed flexible long-term deals with U.S. exporters and have rerouted cargoes to Europe, where gas prices have soared. Benchmark European gas prices hit \$100 per million British thermal units last week—up more than twelvefold from a year ago—before settling at \$79.92 Monday. [European natural-gas futures fell Tuesday](#) as the European Union appeared on the cusp of filling its gas storage to sufficient levels to last through winter, and leaders said they would take measures to ease the continent's energy crisis.

"For the past six months, Europe has become the demand center," said James Huckstepp, a gas analyst at S&P Global Commodity Insights.

While Europe looks unlikely to run out of gas in the immediate future, economists and many politicians fear current energy prices will test the region's political stability and economic resilience if they hold at current levels.

Helen Thompson, professor of political economy at Cambridge University, said the shock reflects how Europe's dependence on Russian energy became entrenched over decades.

"It's not like these difficulties suddenly appeared, it's just that Western politicians now scrambling for non-Russian energy sources find they are either in short supply, like LNG, or hard to come by, like oil," she said.

EU nations are discussing proposals to cap electricity prices across the bloc. Some are also reconsidering years of environmental legislation to shut down [nuclear power plants](#) and reducing the use of fuels such as oil and coal.

Germany has said it would restart idled coal-powered electricity plants this winter to free up gas and is reviewing a decision to shut down [its last three nuclear plants](#) at the end of 2022. It isn't yet dropping laws mandating an end to fossil fuel usage beyond around 2040, however, complicating its bid to secure LNG from Qatar, which insists on multidecade contracts.

Because of this, Germany could struggle after the winter to refill its gas stores, now almost 80% full, said Sigmar Gabriel, a former German economy minister.

Since the [outbreak of the war](#), only one German utility, EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG, has signed a long-term LNG deal, with U.S. firm Venture Global LNG Inc. A spokeswoman for EnBW said that the company, which like most German importers had been using Russian gas, was refocusing on LNG.

Most long-term deals that U.S. exporters struck following Russia's invasion of Ukraine were with portfolio players such as [Chevron](#) Corp. and [Shell](#) PLC, which resell LNG under supply contracts or on a spot basis. As of mid-July, American export companies had sold 42% of contracted LNG to portfolio companies and just 17% to European buyers since March, according to consulting firm Wood Mackenzie.

While Europe easily outspent poorer nations—Bangladesh, for instance, is experiencing regular blackouts because of gas shortages—efforts by Japan and South Korea to stockpile LNG ahead of winter and a possible economic rebound from China as it emerges from lockdowns could increase competition for global LNG supplies and drive prices even higher, analysts said.

Even if more supplies were to become available in the short term, bottlenecks at Europe's re-gasification facilities limit how much excess LNG cargoes the U.K. and parts of northwest Europe can absorb, consulting firm Rystad Energy said.

Germany doesn't yet have a single LNG terminal to receive overseas shipments. The government has leased four floating terminals—giant ships that dock near industrial ports and can process LNG back into gas—and a fifth is being commissioned by a private consortium.

The five temporary terminals each have a capacity of about 5 billion cubic meters a year, meaning that they collectively couldn't replace even half of the annual Nord Stream flow, which is used to supply countries across Europe. In addition, new infrastructure such as pipelines must be built to channel the imported gas toward consumers.

Mario Levesque, president of Utica Resources Inc., a gas exploration and production firm from Quebec that explored a supply deal with Germany, said that it would take at least 18 months for his company to procure vessels to ship a limited amount of gas to Europe.

"I don't see big solutions for Europe," said Mr. Levesque. "They are going to have to lower consumption."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Job openings rose, hiring accelerated
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/job-openings-hiring-economy-july-2022-11661805200?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	U.S. job openings rose in July as employers scooped up workers in a tight labor market.

The Labor Department on Tuesday said there were a seasonally adjusted 11.2 million [job openings in July](#), up from the previous month's upwardly revised 11 million. Job openings have remained elevated and above 10 million since the summer of 2021.

The number of times workers quit their jobs edged down to 4.2 million in July from the prior month's 4.3 million. Layoffs and discharges fell slightly to 1.4 million in July from the prior month's level. Hiring slowed slightly to 6.4 million, down from 6.5 million in June.

The jobs market remains strong, but some signs have pointed to slowing momentum as the Federal Reserve raises interest rates to tamp down inflation running [near a four-decade high](#). The average pace of job growth [in the first half of the year](#) was slower than in all of 2021, and new applications for unemployment benefits [have hovered near the highest point of the year in recent weeks](#).

Later this week, the Labor Department will report how many jobs the U.S. economy added in August and say whether the [unemployment rate held](#) at the 50-year low reached in July. The August employment report will include updated figures on wage gains, a factor driving [high inflation](#).

Job openings still greatly exceed the number of unemployed people seeking work, and separate private-sector estimates show that labor demand remains high, but is slowing as the broader economy loses steam. Jobs site [ZipRecruiter](#) estimates there were about 10 million job openings through mid-August, down from the seasonally adjusted 11.2 million openings in July.

Several companies, including [Ford Motor Co.](#), [Walmart Inc.](#), [Robinhood Markets Inc.](#) and [Redfin Corp.](#), have said they are laying off workers or plan to shrink their workforce as they face [declining business activity](#) and rising interest rates.

"It looks like the Fed raising rates is killing demand across all sectors," said Julia Pollak, chief economist of ZipRecruiter. "It'll become easier to hire in the coming month while candidates become more likely to accept a job offer."

The high level of job openings means that it remains easy for laid-off workers to [quickly land a new job](#). But Ms. Pollak said that some job seekers have become more concerned about job security and more are worried that a job offer they received might be rescinded. The share of job seekers who have said they felt financial pressure to accept the first offer they received has also increased, she added.

Ms. Pollak said she expects the number of times workers quit their jobs, which reached 4.2 million in July, to remain elevated as a result of the impact of remote work. Quitting picked up in 2021 as job openings increased.

"Any person looking for a job before might have been limited to the three job openings in their neighborhood, but now they can apply for 3,000 remote job openings within their occupation nationwide," Ms. Pollak said.

While the U.S. economy in July [had recouped the 22 million jobs](#) it lost at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the labor force [remains smaller](#) than it was in the beginning of 2020. The labor-force participation rate—the share of the population 16 years and older working or seeking work—also fell to 62.1% in July, below the 63.4% in February 2020.

Businesses are still dealing with staffing shortages, which could limit layoffs, said Diane Swonk, chief economist of global audit and consulting firm KPMG LLP.

"A lot of places are still understaffed, so even as the economy slows, that doesn't necessarily mean that businesses are going to fire as many workers," Ms. Swonk said.

George Pfeffer, a management committee member at DPR Construction, said hiring hasn't slowed down as the company of roughly 10,000 workers tries to fill about 300 vacancies.

	<p>Mr. Pfeffer said demand for commercial construction projects remains robust and that his construction company expects to be chipping away at a backlog of work in the coming years. He added that his company will likely hesitate to lay off workers even as economic growth slows.</p> <p>“Keeping our workforce employed for when things turn back up is way more valuable than laying them off and trying to find them again later,” Mr. Pfeffer said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Pakistan flooding: 1/3rd country underwater
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/30/pakistan-flooding-underwater-monsoon/
GIST	<p>Multistory hotels crumbling into rising waters. Surging waves crashing into elevated roads and bridges. An area roughly the size of Colorado now underwater.</p> <p>Showing videos of what they called “apocalyptic” floods currently sweeping their country, Pakistan’s leaders led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif pleaded on Tuesday for aid from developed nations, who they said were responsible for bringing extreme weather to one of the world’s most vulnerable regions.</p> <p>“I can say without any fear of contradiction, this flood situation is probably the worst in the history of Pakistan,” Sharif said.</p> <p>The South Asian country of about 220 million people is now facing an unprecedented crisis after eight consecutive weeks of heavy rainfall. The floods, which have left a third of Pakistan underwater, have killed 1,100 people, affected more than 33 million residents, wiped out 1 million homes and destroyed about 2,200 miles of roads, Pakistani officials said Tuesday. Nearly 500,00 people are in displacement camps.</p> <p>The death toll and economic burden are expected to rise, adding stress to an economically fragile and politically divided country.</p> <p>“We want to showcase this to the developed world in particular,” Ahsan Iqbal, the minister for planning and development, told reporters in Islamabad. “The quality of life that people in the west are enjoying today, someone is paying the price in the developing world.”</p> <p>In southern Sindh province’s Khairpur, one of the hardest hit districts, Zahid Ali Jalalani, a 35-year-old farmer, experienced nonstop rain for the past two months. The water level in his village was rising slowly at first. Then came the flood.</p> <p>One night last week, as he rested with his wife and two children in their single room home, a nearby canal burst, crashing into houses. Some parts of his village were instantly submerged under 10 feet of water.</p> <p>“At one time it seemed as if the walls were shaking, as if there was an earthquake,” he said. “I thought this was the day of judgment, our last hours alive.”</p> <p>As the water receded, Jalalani ran into the darkness to help villagers save residents, some of whom were trapped with water up to their necks. About 250 villagers were hurt when their walls caved in. One man drowned in his home.</p> <p>Now, hundreds of people from his village are living in a makeshift camp that is lacking tents, food and medicine, Jalalani said. “We are living, thank God, but in terrible conditions,” he said. “But people are not willing to go back. Even those whose houses are still standing, they think they could collapse at any time.”</p> <p>The growing number of extreme weather events around the world is due to the planet’s rising temperatures, weather experts say. Higher temperatures mean more water in the air: For every degree of warmer temperature, the air can hold about 4 percent more water, leading to torrential rainfall.</p>

Pakistani officials said Tuesday that the country experienced a slew of abnormal weather events this year. Four heat waves came immediately after the winter, leading to a year “without spring.” The heat scorched crops. But in recent weeks, parts of Pakistan experienced about four times more rainfall than the 30-year average. In Sindh, the city of Karachi has seen 48 inches of rainfall in the past two months. The financial hub, which has a desert climate, usually sees less than 10 inches of rainfall per year.

Catastrophic flooding in Pakistan leaves families stranded without aid

Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s climate minister, said the government has been distributing water pumps to Karachi in recent weeks but the equipment has been overwhelmed.

“Where do you drain the water?” she said. “It’s an ocean. It’s a merciless sky.”

The flooding comes at a particularly difficult time for Pakistan.

Even before the floods, Pakistan faced a steep fall in foreign exchange due to soaring global commodity prices and a rise in the U.S. dollar. The cost of electricity and food has soared. Pakistan has sought a bailout from the International Monetary Fund, which approved the request on Monday and released \$1.1 billion to the country.

Now, the flood is expected to add \$10 billion worth of damage to the teetering economy.

On Tuesday, the United States Agency for International Development announced \$30 million in humanitarian aid, adding to a United Nations contribution of \$3 million last week. The U.N. said it was also launching a new flood relief plan for Pakistan, as its officials echoed calls for greater contributions from around the world.

“This super flood is driven by climate change - the causes are international and so the response calls for international solidarity,” said the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan, Julien Harneis.

Pakistani officials, who have been criticized domestically for not doing enough to respond to the floods, rebuffed the criticism and said no amount of planning would have mitigated the disaster. The country was experiencing a preview of the extreme weather that will eventually hit elsewhere in the world, said Rehman, the climate minister.

“We are literally on the front lines of unfolding climate catastrophe,” she said. “It will happen to others later. It’s time we all took notice.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Seattle-area home prices cool off, decline
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/seattle-area-home-prices-log-first-monthly-decline-since-2019/
GIST	<p>Home-price growth in the US decelerated in June as the sales slowdown gripped the market.</p> <p>A national measure of prices rose 18% year-over-year, smaller than the 19.9% climb in May, the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index showed Tuesday.</p> <p>The housing market has quickly slowed from its pandemic-era frenzy, with the Case-Shiller figures reflecting the start of the pullback that began to pick up pace in June. Mortgage rates that nearly doubled this year have sidelined buyers, leading sales to drop throughout the US. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. economists said Tuesday in a note that price growth will likely slow sharply over the coming quarters.</p> <p>Seattle followed a similar trend. Home prices in the Seattle area remain well above where they were a year ago, but are cooling off.</p>

According to the Case-Shiller index, Seattle-area prices were up about 19% in June from a year earlier, the smallest annual jump since last March. From May to June, prices dipped about 2%, the first month-to-month decline since late 2019.

The index, which lags by two months, tracks prices of single-family homes in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties.

Seattle had the 11th-fastest price growth among the 20 cities the index tracks. That's a turnaround from approximately this time last year, when Seattle ranked third and price growth was breaking local records.

Other indicators have shown a similar market shift. From May through July, home prices in King County dropped 11%, while they were flat at the same time last year, according to separate data from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. Last month, the median single family home sold for \$890,000 in King County, \$770,000 in Snohomish County and \$575,000 in Pierce County.

"The deceleration in U.S. housing prices that we began to observe several months ago continued in June," said Craig Lazzara, a managing director at S&P Dow Jones Indices. "It's important to bear in mind that deceleration and decline are two entirely different things, and that prices are still rising at a robust clip."

The wild bidding wars of the recent past are receding as sellers become more flexible: 92% of owners who sold their homes in the past year accepted some buyer-friendly terms, according to a new report from Realtor.com.

A measure of prices in 20 US cities increased 18.6% in June, down from the 20.5% gain in May. Tampa, Miami and Dallas posted the highest gains.

The market slowdown has caused some big investors to pull back. Home Partners of America, the single-family landlord owned by Blackstone Inc., will stop buying homes in 38 US cities. The company cited home-price appreciation, local regulations and market demand as some factors in figuring out where it would back away.

The index, which covers more than 27 years of data, is an important measure of the health of the housing market in part because of its breadth of measurements around the country.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Satellites track illegal fishing, logging
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/satellite-constellations/
GIST	<p>FISHING BOATS KEPT washing up in Japan with dead North Koreans on board. Dozens were documented every year, but they spiked in 2017, with more than 100 boats found on the northern coasts of Japan. No one could explain the appearance of these ghost ships. Why were there so many?</p> <p>An answer arrived in 2020. Using a swarm of satellites orbiting Earth, a nonprofit organization called Global Fishing Watch in Washington, DC, found that China was fishing illegally in North Korean waters, "in contravention of Chinese and North Korean laws, as well as UN sanctions on North Korea," says Paul Woods, the organization's cofounder and chief innovation officer. As a result, North Korean fishermen were having to travel further afield, as far as Russia, something their small ships weren't suited for. "They couldn't get back," says Woods. China, caught out, promptly halted its activities.</p> <p>The alarming discovery was made possible by the DC-based firm Spire Global, which operates more than 100 small satellites in Earth orbit. These are designed to pick up the radio pings sent out by boats across the globe, which are primarily used by vessels to avoid each other on the seas. Listening out for them is also a useful way to track illegal maritime activity.</p> <p>"The way they move when they're fishing is distinct," says Woods of the boats. "We can predict what kind of fishing gear they're using by their speed, direction, and the way they turn." Of the 60,000 vessels</p>

that emit such pings, Woods says 5,000 have been found conducting illegal activities thanks to Spire, including fishing at restricted times or offloading hauls of protected fish to other vessels to avoid checks at ports.

Satellite constellations like Spire's have seen huge growth in recent years, and novel uses like this are becoming more common. Where once satellites would be large, bulky machines costing tens of millions of dollars, technological advances mean smaller, toaster-sized ones can now be launched at a fraction of the cost. Flying these together in groups, or constellations, to conduct unique assignments has become an affordable prospect. "It's now economically viable to deploy many, many more satellites," says Joel Spark, cofounder and a general manager at Spire.

Before 2018, no constellations of more than 100 active satellites had ever been launched into Earth orbit, says Jonathan McDowell, a satellite expert at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in the US. Now there are three, with nearly 20 more constellations in the process of being launched and some [200 more in development](#). It is a "boom in constellations," says McDowell.

The reasons for flying constellations are numerous. The most notorious is to beam the internet to remote locations, made famous by SpaceX's Starlink mega-constellation. This vast swarm of 3,000 satellites accounts for nearly half of all those in orbit, and it will swell further to 12,000 or more. Others, like Amazon, have plans for vast space internet constellations of their own. Many are worried about launching so many satellites into orbit, significantly raising the risk of collisions and producing dangerous space junk.

Smaller satellite constellations have their problems too. Many of their satellites lack the ability to maneuver, for example, to avoid a collision. "I'm a little uncomfortable with it," says McDowell, although their small size means most fall back into our atmosphere within a few years, naturally clearing the skies. For now we can cope, but stricter regulation will be needed in the future as more are launched.

Satellite constellations can encompass the globe, providing valuable data that single satellites cannot. Some can track [illegal methane emissions](#), others can provide useful communications networks, and others still can provide constant imagery of our planet's surface. "I definitely did not expect the diversity of use cases," says Sara Spangelo, cofounder and CEO of Swarm Technologies in California, whose own constellation of 160 satellites allows small packets of data to be sent between devices around the globe, even from remote locations, creating a worldwide internet of things.

One organization—Rainforest Connection, based in Texas—has found a particularly novel way of using Swarm's satellites: tracking illegal logging and poaching in more than 32 countries. In areas where loggers or poachers might operate, Rainforest places solar-powered acoustic sensors called Guardians high in treetops, designed to blend in with the tree from the ground. If the sensors pick up the sound of illegal activity up to 1.5 kilometers away (assessed by software on board the Guardians), such as chain saws or gunshots, they send a signal to one of Swarm's satellites overhead, which relays the information back to a ground station.

This allows Rainforest Connection to alert law enforcement or locals to illegal activity, from villages in Sumatra to lands that are home to Indigenous tribes in Brazil. "In countries like Brazil and Malaysia, deforestation contributes to over 70 percent of their total greenhouse gas emissions," says Bourhan Yassin, Rainforest's CEO. "It's a very large problem."

Prior to working with Swarm, Rainforest relied on cellular networks to transmit data. While quicker, that limited its monitoring to regions near populated areas. "With Swarm, we can put the devices anywhere we want," says Yassin. "It's doubled up the capability we can do."

Gai Jorayev at University College London's Institute of Archaeology, meanwhile, is using imagery from a constellation of more than 200 satellites run by the California firm Planet Labs to track Russia's shelling of archaeological sites in Ukraine. Planet's satellites take images of the entire Earth every day. This has

	<p>enabled Jorayev, working with the Global Heritage Fund in California, to find that more than 165 sites have been damaged or destroyed by Russian shelling.</p> <p>“Almost everywhere I look, I’m surprised by the levels of damage,” says Jorayev. “I did not expect it at this scale. The damage is very, very bad.”</p> <p>Planet has provided its imagery free of charge to Jorayev and his team. “I’m exceptionally grateful,” says Jorayev. The hope is that Russia can be held accountable for its actions in future. That, however, “is a long process,” he says.</p> <p>These are just a handful of ways satellite constellations are being used today: Spire says it has more than 700 customers, Planet also 700, and Swarm about 300. Concerns about collisions and the satellites’ potential to create space junk are well founded, but if we can find ways to adequately supervise these constellations, there are many ways they can prove useful.</p> <p>“There are important roles that large constellations can play,” says McDowell. “It’s a question of managing it, and not having it be a free-for-all.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Freight rail crisis; supply chain chaos
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/a-us-freight-rail-crisis-threatens-more-supply-chain-chaos/
GIST	<p>EARLY THIS SUMMER, farmers worried that millions of chickens in California’s Central Valley might soon peck each other to death. The birds were running perilously low on feed, which should have been delivered by Union Pacific Railroad from Midwestern corn producers. Foster Farms needed at least nine trainloads of corn each month to feed its tens of millions of chickens and turkeys, plus tens of thousands of dairy cows at its California facilities. But the trains weren’t showing up. Chickens can’t go long without eating—they become aggressive and turn to cannibalism—and if the feed didn’t arrive soon, the mega-flock would have to be euthanized.</p> <p>Executives at Foster Farms began behaving like, well, chickens with their heads cut off. “Your failure to deliver is about to kill millions of chickens,” one incensed vice president at the company emailed a director at Union Pacific. “These dead animals will have to be picked up in dump trucks and taken to the local dumps. This is going to be an animal disaster, [and an] economic and media nightmare.”</p> <p>After unsuccessfully pleading with another railroad for relief and paying more than \$1.5 million on backup transportation modes like trucks, Foster Farms turned to the federal government. The company wrote in a June letter to the Surface Transportation Board, which regulates railroads, that Union Pacific had once provided service “with reasonable regularity ... but has demonstrated, without any doubt, that it can no longer do so for the indefinite future under its current operating plans and priorities.” Two days later, the STB issued an emergency service order directing Union Pacific to prioritize corn shipments to Foster Farms. The chickens were spared—at least from starvation.</p> <p>But rail service remained poor, not just at Union Pacific, and not just for chickens at Foster Farms. Since early this year, companies across numerous industries that ship goods via rail have issued increasingly stark warnings that the US freight system is in a state of crisis—complaining of weeks-long waits for trains, backed up facilities, clogged ports, and suspended business.</p> <p>In April, the STB held hearings on the meltdown, where representatives from sectors including agriculture, energy, and chemicals joined trade unions to complain of poor service and working conditions. STB data says railroads cut their workforce by 45,000, or 29 percent, over the past six years, with pandemic furloughs pushing staffing levels past a tipping point. By late May, only 67 percent of trains arrived within 24 hours of their scheduled time, down from 85 percent pre-pandemic, according to data submitted to the STB by the four largest US freight railroads.</p>

Worse, the US freight rail system is now poised on the brink of total paralysis because of a contract dispute between 115,000 rail workers and their employers. Negotiations have dragged on since the last contract expired in 2019, during which time rail workers have not had a raise. Under the Railway Labor Act, federal government mediators try to prevent railroad work stoppages, in this case to no avail. On August 16, a three-member presidential emergency board appointed by President Biden issued recommendations for the basis of a new contract. If the sides don't reach agreement by September 15, rail workers can strike—a scenario that Rick Paterson, a rail analyst at the investment firm Loop Capital Markets who testified during the STB hearings, calls “economic WMD.”

The fallout of a prolonged strike would likely eclipse those from [pandemic delays to ocean shipping](#) because a foundational component of many supply chains would see its labor supply evaporate overnight, says Paterson. Ports would jam; trucking rates would soar; livestock would run out of feed. For that reason, Congress would likely intervene to delay or quickly end a strike, as it did during the last railroad strike in 1991. But lawmakers may not have much time: The deadline is just three days after the House of Representatives returns from recess.

Profit Warning

US freight railroads cut staff in recent years as part of a shift toward a leaner and more profitable operating model dubbed Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR). It was invented by a Canadian railroad executive and later replicated in the US, with the intention of simplifying a complex rail network by running fewer, longer trains, replacing single-commodity trains with mixed freight, and slashing labor. US freight trains [grew 25 percent](#) in length between 2008 and 2017 and now sometimes reach 3 miles long. And while the profits materialized, the promised service improvements have not always followed.

Rail customers, labor unions, and the STB all say that the bare-bones operating model stripped the US freight rail system of its resiliency to disruptions, be it something quotidian like weather or more catastrophic, like a pandemic. “Covid was an extreme case, but it was entirely predictable that there was going to be, at some point, an increase in demand, and that they didn't have the capacity to handle it,” says Jeff Sloan, senior director of transportation and infrastructure at the American Chemistry Council, a trade group that represents some of the railroads' biggest customers.

All the while, rail companies have raked in much larger profits. A recent [Bloomberg](#) analysis found that the five largest US-owned freight railroads—BNSF, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific—saw operating margins, a measure of profit, increase by a third over the past decade. They soared to 41 percent in 2021, a level described as “off the charts” relative to other transportation companies. Last year, 170-year-old [BNSF](#), owned by Warren Buffett, and 160-year-old [Union Pacific](#) both reported record profits.

In a statement, Ted Greener, spokesperson for the Association of American Railroads, which represents the major freight rail companies, wrote, “Railroads continue to work to return service to a level customers deserve and expect,” including through hiring. “Railroads are also fully committed to reaching an agreement with their employees on a new contract.”

Workers, for their part, complain that the leaner PSR model has heaped more work upon them, causing more fatigue, injury, and burnout. Stricter attendance policies meant to boost staffing levels have prompted [protests](#) and [resignations](#). “If you're looking to move increasing amounts of freight with fewer and fewer people, you're going to work people longer hours, which increases the risks of injury or accidents,” says Greg Regan, head of union federation AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department, a coalition of 37 transportation unions.

Regan says more railroaders are leaving what used to often be a lifelong career, because the pay and benefits no longer outweigh the costs of a punishing schedule. Railroads furloughed many workers early in the pandemic after demand sank, but they found most people declined when asked to return after business began to pick up again.

The combination of a skeletal workforce and a low worker recall rate proved calamitous. “A lot of our membership is saying this is the worst rail service they've ever experienced in their careers,” says Max Fisher, chief economist at the National Grain and Feed Association, which represents grain producers. He says that facilities such as ethanol plants and flour mills have had to halt production after exhausting the available rail cars to load product into, raising business costs and consumer prices. The American Chemistry Council found that three-quarters of its members have shifted some freight volume from trains to trucks, which are costlier, produce more carbon emissions, and can be impractical for high-volume shipments, like say, a million bushels of corn.

Rail Disaster

When Esmeralda Montelongo, a first-generation Mexican American, started working at Union Pacific in Southern California 15 years ago, she was ecstatic. “I had made it,” she says. “I had a union job.” Her position as a shipping clerk, which involves checking in and directing shipments as they arrive at the rail yard, supported a decent quality of life in the Los Angeles suburbs, where she lives with her three kids and husband, who is also a rail worker. But it didn’t last.

Montelongo, who is now chair of her local union branch, remembers when PSR came to Union Pacific. In 2018 a consultant began making the rounds, identifying which jobs could be eliminated. “People used to call him the butcher,” she says. After the cuts, Montelongo began working 16-hour shifts, often back-to-back, and saw more of her fatigued coworkers getting injured. She started missing time with her kids, unable to go on family excursions or cook them a hot meal. While the overtime isn’t mandatory, if a worker declines, she says, managers threaten to cut their position. “You do what you have to do to protect the job.”

Union Pacific spokesperson Kristen South says that employee health, safety, and well-being are a priority and that the company has been working to improve its safety programs. She says PSR increases train speeds and reduces the amount of time trains are stopped.

In addition to the personal toll they suffer, some workers say the leaner operating model has damaged railroad infrastructure, harming the system’s performance. A surfacing crew foreman for BNSF, who requested anonymity because he’s not authorized to speak to the media, said that crews used to proactively maintain tracks to keep trains running smoothly, through a process called tamping. Now workers wait for something to break before attending to it. “We’re completely reactionary,” the foreman says, a shift he says sometimes forces trains to run more slowly over certain portions of track, or stop entirely. BNSF says it proactively maintains its tracks using a variety of technologies, including sensors on trains, cameras, lasers, radar, and machine vision.

Unions have also disputed how railroads have used new congressionally-mandated automated emergency braking systems to justify plans to remove conductors from trains, which would leave the engineer the sole human in charge of up to 3 miles of rail cars moving at up to 70 miles an hour. While the new braking system automatically stops a train if it blows through a signal, rail unions argue that it is not a replacement for a second set of hands and eyes on a lengthy vehicle that sometimes carries hazardous material.

The unions often point to a 2013 [rail disaster](#) in Quebec in which a lone engineer failed to properly secure a train before stepping off, and it rolled down a hill, killing 47 people and destroying most of a downtown. Afterwards, Canada’s government passed a law mandating two-person crews; last month, the US Federal Railroad Administration proposed setting its own rule to do the same, which the railroads association opposes.

The unpredictable schedules demanded by railroad companies often lead to sleep deprivation and poor health, making solo shifts dangerous, says Jordan Boone, a conductor for BNSF and a legislative representative for the transportation division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD). “It’s not a sustainable lifestyle, to be on those trains by yourself,” he says. What’s more, “if something happens, it could take hours for somebody to get to you because we run in very remote locations.”

Greener Option

Trade associations, including those for the grain and chemicals industries, say one underlying cause of the rail crisis is a lack of competition. The number of major freight railroads has shrunk over the years, and in some areas, customers are captive to a single line. In Congress, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is considering [a bill](#) that would create incentives for better service. The railroads association opposes the bill. The STB is also considering [rule changes](#) that would increase competition.

Greg Regan, of the transportation unions coalition TTD, says railroads deserve better for more than just business reasons, because they are more environmentally friendly and cost-efficient than alternatives like trucks. “The railroads should be a growing sector,” he says. “That is not happening right now, in part because the only focus from the corporate side is on quarterly shareholder returns, not long-term growth and what is ultimately better for our country.”

Sloan of the American Chemistry Council says rail freight problems could also hinder attempts to boost US semiconductor production. The [CHIPS Act](#), a funding package passed last month, is expected to drive new business to chemical companies that produce chip components. “If you’re looking to make more things in America, like semiconductors,” Sloan says, “you need to be able to move them.” The recently signed US climate bill ties tax credits on electric vehicles to a [requirement to process battery materials domestically](#), a reshaping of supply chains that could also depend on trains.

Unions and railroad companies now have two weeks left to consider the Presidential Emergency Board’s [recommendations](#) and reach agreement before a possible strike. The board essentially split each side’s proposal down the middle, suggesting a series of raises equivalent to 24 percent over five years, and asking employees to pay more for health insurance. The railroads association indicated its willingness to accept the recommendations, but labor groups have expressed [disappointment](#), with some saying that the board’s recommendations didn’t go far enough, in part because they did not address intense work schedules.

After two years of supply chain woes, businesses and consumers may be about to get a new demonstration of what happens when a transportation network usually taken for granted grinds to a halt. Transportation consultant Larry Gross says that the pandemic delays and ongoing rail freight crisis are a reminder that an increasingly [disaster-prone world](#) demands hardier transportation networks. “These sorts of mega-disruptions are happening a lot more often than they used to,” he says. “The system needs to change to become a little bit more resilient and a little bit more flexible than it used to be.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Russia proxy leader flees Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-proxy-leader-kirill-stremousov-reportedly-flees-amid-ukraines-kherson-offensive?ref=home
GIST	<p>A day after Ukraine announced that its long-awaited counteroffensive to take back the southern Kherson region had begun, unconfirmed reports have emerged of several villages being liberated—and at least one Russian proxy leader of the region fleeing to safety in Russia.</p> <p>Kirill Stremousov, the deputy head of Kherson, was called out Tuesday for apparently filming a video message proclaiming Ukraine had been defeated from a Marriott hotel in Voronezh, Russia.</p> <p>“Russia is in Kherson forever,” Stremousov said, claiming the Ukrainian offensive had been derailed on the very same day it began.</p> <p>But a Ukrainian activist was quick to point out that Stremousov appeared to have filmed the video more than 500 miles from Kherson—somewhere near the Cathedral of Annunciation in Voronezh, which could be seen in the background, along with the Voronezh reservoir. Social-media users then found photos showing the view from a Marriott hotel that matched the background in the same video where Stremousov declared the Ukrainian offensive “useless.”</p>

Stremousov's apparent departure from Kherson came after another Russian-appointed official in the region, Alexei Kovalev, was shot dead in front of his home over the weekend, according to Russia's [Investigative Committee](#). Kovalev, the former deputy head of agriculture in Kherson, had previously been a member of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's party in parliament before switching sides and joining up with Russian occupiers who took over the city in early March.

Another Russian-appointed official in the city survived an assassination attempt Tuesday when an explosive device detonated near his vehicle, Russia's TASS news agency [reported](#), without naming the official.

The assassination attempt came after Zelensky warned Russian troops in occupied territories that it's "time to run" if they want to survive Ukraine's offensive.

While Ukrainian authorities have declined to release any details on their offensive in Kherson, Russian defense officials have gone out of their way to play it down, claiming late Monday that it had "failed miserably." The Russian defense ministry, in its Tuesday briefing, also claimed to have killed more than 1,200 Ukrainian servicemen during the offensive launched a day earlier.

But Russia's claims of military victories come as Western officials warn Moscow's situation is not nearly as rosy as they make it out to be.

"Most of the [Russian] units around Kherson are likely undermanned and are reliant upon fragile supply lines by ferry and pontoon bridges across the Dnipro," the U.K. defense ministry [said](#) in its latest assessment of the war on Tuesday.

The Iranian drones that Russia's military is now in possession of, which have widely been seen as a potential game-changer in the Kremlin's war, have also shown "numerous failures" when tested, according to U.S. officials cited by [CNN](#) on Tuesday.

And despite Russia's claims that it had already stifled the Ukrainian offensive in Kherson, a series of explosions were reported in and around the city Tuesday, while one local Ukrainian lawmaker, Sergii Khlan, [reported](#) that a yacht club occupied by Russian forces had taken a direct hit.

An unnamed source in the Ukrainian military was also quoted telling CNN the army had already taken back four villages in the region, though Ukraine's Armed Forces would not confirm that claim.

"Unlike CNN, I am very worried about the fate of those people who are living in these settlements and about those units fighting, so we are not confirming anything yet. We are working and will announce [new developments] as soon as possible," Natalya Gumenyuk, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian armed forces in the south, [said](#) in televised comments Tuesday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Millions in new China Covid lockdown
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/millions-covid-lockdown-china-strict-policy-89040640
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China has placed millions of its citizens under renewed lockdown following fresh outbreaks of COVID-19, authorities reported Tuesday, as the government persists in its hard-line policy on containing the virus.</p> <p>The measures affected about half of the 6 million residents of the port city of Dalian, along with an undisclosed number in Chengde and Shijiazhuang in Hebei province, both around three hours from the capital Beijing.</p> <p>Dalian's lockdown was due to last five days, although authorities have in past extended restrictions depending on the number of new cases.</p>

Beijing has been relatively unaffected thus far, although travel in and out of the capital has been discouraged and residents are subject to testing on an almost daily basis.

Partial lockdowns have also been imposed on cities such as Chengdu in the southwest, Shenyang in the northeast and Jishui in the southeast.

Such measures are mandated under China's "zero-COVID" policy, which contrasts starkly with moves by other nations to coexist with the virus through gradual easing of restrictions, vaccinations, improved therapeutics and voluntary isolation.

China has largely kept its borders closed to foreign visitors, while requiring those who do come to submit to more than a week of quarantine in hotels where sanitary conditions are often poor. Masking and regular testing are also standard and anyone found to have been in close contact with a person confirmed to have the virus is forcibly transported to field hospitals.

The World Health Organization has called China's policy unsustainable and on Monday, a Chinese think tank issued a rare public disagreement with the ruling Communist Party, saying the curbs that have shut down cities and disrupted trade, travel and industry must change to prevent an "economic stall."

The Anbound Research Center gave no details of possible changes but said President Xi Jinping's government needs to focus on shoring up sinking growth. It noted the United States, Europe and Japan are recovering economically after easing anti-disease curbs.

"Preventing the risk of economic stall should be the priority task," the think tank said in a report titled, "It's Time for China to Adjust Its Virus Control and Prevention Policies."

Previous lockdowns have seen tens of millions confined to their homes, sometimes for weeks. A strict lockdown in the largest city and commercial hub of Shanghai earlier this year led to protests online and in person over lack of food and medical services.

China on Tuesday reported 1,717 cases of local transmission, 52 of them in Liaoning province where Dalian is located. Most of the cases were reported in Sichuan province, whose capital is Chengdu, and the vast majority were asymptomatic.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Covid Chicago schools triple from last year
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-cases-students-1st-week-chicago-schools-triple/story?id=89045790
GIST	<p>COVID-19 cases during the first week of the 2022-23 school year in Chicago Public Schools are much higher compared to the same time last year.</p> <p>According to CPS data, 449 students have tested positive for the virus during the first week of the new school year -- 3.3 times higher than the 135 students who tested positive during the first week of the 2021-22 school year.</p> <p>Additionally, 315 adults -- including people such as faculty and administrators -- have contracted COVID-19, CPS data shows. That's 4.8 times higher than the 65 adults who had COVID during the same period last year.</p> <p>Doctors told ABC News it's not surprising more cases of the virus are cropping up compared to last school year for a couple of reasons.</p> <p>One reason is because the BA.5 variant, an offshoot of the original omicron variant, is continuing to spread -- making up 90% of cases in the Midwest, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>

"Obviously COVID is still circulating in the community and the variant of COVID that is circulating, BA.5, is extremely transmissible, so that one person that's infected can infect a lot more individuals," Dr. Tina Tan, a professor of pediatrics at Feinberg School of Medicine of Northwestern University and a pediatric infectious diseases physician at Ann & Robert Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, told ABC News.

The second reason is because mitigation measures have been loosened.

During a media briefing earlier this month, the CDC said it was [no longer recommending unvaccinated people quarantine](#) after exposure, instead suggesting they mask up for 10 days and get tested five days after they were being exposed.

Following the news, CPS [announced](#) there would no longer be a requirement for students exposed to the virus to quarantine unless they test positive.

Additionally, masks continue to be optional for students and staff in school buildings and on school buses after CPS dropped its mask mandate in March.

Tan said some of these mitigation measures may need to be reinstated if COVID-19 cases continue to rise.

"If someone's exposed and they're not symptomatic, they can still go to school, but they should be wearing a mask," she said. "How many kids are actually doing that? I don't know. But I think that if the numbers continue to rise the way they're rising, one of the probably best things to consider is to put back into place a mask mandate."

The Chicago Teacher's Union said the increase in cases is concerning and, if infections continue to climb, it will demand that a mask mandate be reestablished.

"There is nothing stopping the district and we have advocated for this to immediately reimpose a mask mandate, if they are seeing spread," CTU vice president Jackson Potter told local affiliate [ABC 7 Chicago](#).

The CTU did not immediately reply to ABC News' request for comment.

Tan said she also wants to encourage parents to vaccinate their kids, especially considering the low vaccination rate among students.

CPS data shows only about 51% of eligible students at district-run schools are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The percentages vary widely depending on age. More than 63% of students aged 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated compared to a little more than 14% of children ages 4 and under.

"People just need to remember that COVID is still circulating in the community," Tan said. "Yes, this particular variant tends to cause mild disease. However, there are normal healthy children that will develop more severe disease with BA.5 and may be hospitalized from it."

She continued. "So, the best way to protect their children is to vaccinate them."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Jackson mayor: water crisis to cost billions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/jackson-mississippi-water-shortage-crisis-cost-billions-dollars/story?id=89061056
GIST	Staffing shortages, system issues and multiple equipment failures have led to a crisis where Jackson, Mississippi, residents have lost running water for an indefinite amount of time, Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said at a press conference on Tuesday.

Lumumba attributed the city's water crisis to a lack of maintenance over the last few decades, adding that it will cost billions of dollars to fix the issue.

"This is a set of accumulated problems based on deferred maintenance that's not taken place over decades," Lumumba said.

Lumumba estimated it would cost at least \$1 billion to fix the water distribution system and billions more to resolve the issue altogether.

"The residents of Jackson are worthy of a dependable system, and we look forward to a coalition of the willing who will join us in the fight to improve this system that's been failing for decades," Lumumba said.

At least 180,000 people will go without reliable drinking water indefinitely in Jackson after pumps at the main water treatment plant failed this week, officials said.

A major pump at Jackson's O.B. Curtis Water Treatment Plant was damaged, forcing the city to use backup pumps, Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said at a news conference Monday evening.

Reeves declared a State of Emergency on Tuesday and activated the state's National Guard to help officials deal with the ongoing water emergency.

"The state is marshaling tremendous resources to protect the people of our capital city," Reeves said at the conference.

Residents will not have reliable running water in the state's capital until the problem is fixed, officials said.

Reeves said the water shortage would make it more difficult for Jackson to produce enough water to fight fires, flush toilets and other essential needs.

Residents have lined up on roads and highways throughout the city to get to water distribution sites.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Mississippi has not formally asked the federal government to help bring in water but is ready to help "in any way that we can" when that request is made.

"We stand ready and we are eager to assist further as soon as we receive an official request from the state," she said on Air Force One Tuesday.

Officials are warning the city's residents not to drink the water because it's raw water from the reservoirs being pushed through the pipes.

Jackson has been under a boil water notice since July 29.

In February 2021, freezing temperatures caused water and power outages in Jackson.

Lumumba told ABC News Live Prime on Tuesday that Jackson doesn't just need a sustainable system, but also an equitable one.

"We suffer in the southern portion of our city most disproportionately," he said. "Some of the most impoverished parts of our city are feeling the brunt of this challenge more consistently and worse off than the rest of our city."

A day after the current water crisis was announced, Jackson's Public Works Director Marlin King was reassigned to another role, Lumumba said.

	King now serves as the deputy director of public works, while the former director of planning and development, Jordan Hillman, will fill King's old position, according to ABC News Jackson affiliate WAPT .
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Life expectancy plunged again 2021
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/us-life-expectancy-plunged-2021-year-89083634
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- U.S. life expectancy dropped for the second consecutive year in 2021, falling by nearly a year from 2020, according to a government report being released Wednesday.</p> <p>In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the estimated American lifespan has shortened by nearly three years. The last comparable decrease happened in the early 1940s, during the height of World War II.</p> <p>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials blamed COVID-19 for about half the decline in 2021, a year when vaccinations became widely available but new coronavirus variants caused waves of hospitalizations and deaths. Other contributors to the decline are longstanding problems: drug overdoses, heart disease, suicide and chronic liver disease.</p> <p>"It's a dismal situation. It was bad before and it's gotten worse," said Samuel Preston, a University of Pennsylvania demographer.</p> <p>Life expectancy is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live, given death rates at that time. It is "the most fundamental indicator of population health in this country," said Robert Hummer, a University of North Carolina researcher focused on population health patterns.</p> <p>U.S. life expectancy rose for decades, but progress stalled before the pandemic.</p> <p>It was 78 years, 10 months in 2019. In 2020, it dropped to 77 years. Last year, it fell to about 76 years, 1 month.</p> <p>The last time it was that low was in 1996.</p> <p>Declines during the pandemic were worse for some racial groups, and some gaps widened. For example, life expectancy for American Indian and Alaskan Native people saw a decline of more than 6 1/2 years since the pandemic began, and is at 65 years. In the same span, life expectancy for Asian Americans dropped by about two years, and stands at 83 1/2.</p> <p>Experts say there are many possible reasons for such differences, including lack of access to quality health care, lower vaccination rates, and a greater share of the population in lower-paying jobs that required them to keep working when the pandemic was at its worst.</p> <p>The new report is based on provisional data. Life expectancy estimates can change with the addition of more data and further analysis. For example, the CDC initially said life expectancy in 2020 declined by about 1 year 6 months. But after more death reports and analysis came in, it ended up being about 1 year 10 months.</p> <p>But it's likely the declines in 2020 and 2021 will stand as the first two consecutive years of declining life expectancy in the U.S. since the early 1960s, CDC officials said.</p> <p>Findings in the report:</p> <p>—Life expectancy for women in the United States dropped about 10 months, from just under 80 years in 2020 to slightly more than 79 in 2021. Life expectancy for men dropped a full year, from about 74 years to 73.</p>

—COVID-19 deaths were the main reason for the decline. The second largest contributor was deaths from accidental injuries — primarily from drug overdoses, which killed a record-breaking 107,000 Americans last year.

—White people saw the second biggest drop among racial and ethnic groups, with life expectancy falling one year, to about 76 years, 5 months. Black Americans had the third largest decline, falling more than eight months, to 70 years, 10 months

—Hispanic Americans had seen a huge drop in life expectancy in 2020 — four years. But in 2021, life expectancy for them dropped by about two months, to about 77 years, 7 months. Preston thinks good vaccination rates among Hispanics played a role.

The report also suggests gains against suicide are being undone.

U.S. suicides rose from the early 2000s until 2018. But they fell a little in 2019 and then more in 2020, the first year of the pandemic. Experts had wondered if that may have been related to a phenomenon seen in the early stages of wars and national disasters in which people band together and support each other.

The new report said suicide contributed to the decline in life expectancy in 2021, but it did not provide detail. According to provisional numbers from a public CDC database, the number of U.S. suicides increased last year by about 2,000, to 48,000. The U.S. suicide rate rose as well, from 13.5 per 100,000 to 14.1 — bringing it back up to about where it was in 2018.

[Return to Top](#)

Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Ready? Mass video deepfakes are coming
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/08/30/deep-fake-video-on-agi/
GIST	<p>It was mainly out of self-amusement that Chris Ume created a fake Tom Cruise.</p> <p>The special-effects artist wanted to try something different during the doldrums of 2020. So working with a Tom Cruise look-alike, he used AI and facial-mapping technology to invent a series of comedic deepfake videos and, in early 2021, unleashed them on TikTok. The DeepTomCruise account quickly became popular, then vanished from the public mind, replaced by the next viral diversion.</p> <p>Ume is now back and on a mission — to commercialize video deepfakes for the planned metaverse and make them as central to digital life as tweets and memes.</p> <p>He'll take that next step Tuesday when a deepfake developed by Metaphysic, the company he formed with entrepreneur Tom Graham, will compete in the semifinals of the NBC reality hit "America's Got Talent."</p> <p>"This is a good chance to raise awareness and show off what we can do," said Ume.</p> <p>"We think the web would be much better if instead of avatars we lived in the world of the hyper-real," Graham added, describing users' ability to manipulate actual faces with Metaphysic.</p> <p>The start-up's appearance to millions on TV will lay the groundwork for its new website that seeks to make it easier for ordinary people to have their faces say and do things they never did in real life. Many other such sites are aimed at programmers and researchers.</p>

And the act — in which they will follow up a raucous preliminary-round appearance that had them overlaying a young Simon Cowell’s face on the screen above a stage performer so [the judge appeared to be singing to himself](#) — will offer a shiny advertisement for a tech that’s democratizing with astonishing speed.

Yet some critics are horrified by this celebratory moment on a top-rated television show. Video deepfakes, they say, blur a line between fiction and reality that’s barely clear now. If disinformation-peddlers can have so much success with words and doctored images, imagine what they can do with a full video.

“We’re quickly entering a world where everything, even videos, can be manipulated by pretty much anyone who wants to,” said Hany Farid, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley and an expert on deepfakes. “What can go wrong?”

The unveiling on what for most weeks this summer is the most-watched show on network television comes at the end of a frenetic summer in the world of deepfakes, which use the deep-learning of artificial intelligence to create fake media (supporters prefer “synthetic” or “AI-generated”).

While many Americans were blissfully engaging in quaint analogue activities like going to the beach, a start-up named [Midjourney](#) offered “AI art-generation,” in which anyone with a basic graphics card could with a few keystrokes create stunningly real images. To spend even a few minutes with it — there’s Gordon Ramsay burning up in his Hell’s Kitchen; here’s Gandalf shredding on a guitar — is to experience a technology that makes Photoshop look like Wite-Out. Midjourney has gathered more than a million users on its Discord channel.

Three weeks ago, a start-up named Stable AI released a program called Stable Diffusion. The AI image-generator is an open-source program that, unlike some rivals, places few limits on the images people can create, leading critics to say it [can be used](#) for scams, political disinformation and privacy violations.

“We should be worried. I follow the technology every day, and *I’m* worried,” said Subbarao Kambhampati, a professor at the School of Computing & AI at Arizona State University who has studied deepfakes and virtual identities. He said he expects the “AGT” moment will make platforms like these take off even further, even as the technology improves by the day.

“It’s moving so fast. Soon anyone will be able [to] create a moon landing that looks like the real thing,” he said.

Ume and Graham say deceit is not their goal. Ume emphasizes the entertainment value: The company will market itself to Hollywood studios that want to present deceased actors in movies (with an estate’s permission) or have performers play against their younger selves.

As for ordinary users, Ume says the aim of Metaphysic is to make online interactions feel more real — none of the whimsy of video games or flatness of Zoom. “I imagine being able to have breakfast with my grandparents in Belgium from here in Bangkok and feel like I’m really there,” said Ume from his current base.

Graham adds that synthetic media will, far from damaging privacy, bolster it. “I would like to see a world where communication online is a more humane experience owned and controlled by humans,” said Graham, a Harvard-educated lawyer who founded a digital graphics company before turning to crypto and, eventually, deepfakes. “I don’t think that happens in the Web2 world of today.”

Farid is unconvinced. “They’re only telling half the story — the one about you using your own image,” he said. “The other side is someone else using it to defraud, spread disinformation and disrupt society. And you have to ask if being able to move around a little more on Zoom is worth that.”

Deepfake technology began eight years ago with the use of “generative adversarial networks.” Created by computer scientist [Ian Goodfellow](#), it essentially pit two AIs against each other to compete for the most realistic images. The results were far superior to basic machine-learning techniques. Goodfellow would go on to work for Google, Apple and, now, DeepMind, a Google subsidiary.

Early on deepfakes were used by skilled exploiters, who infamously grafted actress’s faces onto pornographic videos. But with the tech requiring fewer tools, it can now be deployed by everyday people for a range of uses, which Metaphysic hopes to further.

The company earlier this year attracted a \$7.5 million investment from the likes of the Winklevoss twins, [the social-media-turned-crypto entrepreneurs](#), and Section 32, the [VC fund from original Google Ventures founder Bill Maris](#). “We believe the impact will be far-ranging,” Andy Harrison, managing partner at Section 32, said of Metaphysic. Harrison, also a Google veteran, said he saw video deepfakes not as a threat but an enlivening change to consumption and communication.

“Frankly, I’m pretty excited,” he said. “I think it’s a new era in entertainment and social interaction.” Critics, though, worry about the “liar’s dividend,” in which a web flooded with video deepfakes muddies the water even for legitimate videos, causing no one to believe anything.

“Video has been the last frontier of verification online. And now it could be gone, too,” Farid said. He cited the unifying power of the George Floyd video in 2020 as unlikely in a world flooded by deepfake videos.

Asked about “AGT’s” role in promoting deepfakes, a spokesperson for production company Fremantle declined to provide a comment for this story. But a person close to the show who asked for anonymity because they were prohibited legally from commenting on an ongoing competition said they believed that there was a social utility to the Metaphysic act. “By using the innovation in a completely transparent way,” the person said, “they are showing a mainstream audience how this technology can work.”

One solution to the truth issue could come in the form of authentication. A cross-industry effort involving Adobe, Microsoft and Intel would verify and make transparent the creator of every video to assure people it was real. But it’s not clear how many would adopt it.

Kambhampati, the ASU researcher, said he fears the world will end up in one of two places: “Either nobody trusts anything they watch anymore, or we need an elaborate system of authentication so they do.”

“I hope it’s the second,” he said, then added, “not that that seems so great, either.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 Saudis jail woman 45yrs: social media use
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/saudi-woman-45-years-prison-social-media-89091538
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- A Saudi court has sentenced a woman to 45 years in prison for allegedly damaging the country through her social media activity, according to a court document obtained Wednesday. It was the second such sentence that has drawn scrutiny of the kingdom this month.</p> <p>Little is known about Nourah bint Saeed al-Qahtani, who hails from one of the biggest tribes in Saudi Arabia and has no apparent history of activism. An official charge sheet seen by The Associated Press and human rights groups describes her case as involving her social media use, though Saudi officials did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The sentence follows international outcry over a similar 34-year prison sentence handed down to Salma al-Shehab, a Saudi doctoral student at Leeds University in England.</p>

Earlier this month, a specialized criminal court delivered the 45-year sentence under the kingdom's broad counterterrorism and cybercrime laws. That court, which normally handles political and national security cases, gave the sentence during al-Qahtani's appeal of her earlier conviction.

Judges accused al-Qahtani of "disrupting the cohesion of society" and "destabilizing the social fabric," according to the charge sheet, citing her activity on social media. They alleged al-Qahtani "offended the public order through the information network."

It remains unclear what al-Qahtani posted online or where her hearing was held. She was taken into custody on July 4, 2021, according to the Washington-based human rights watchdog Democracy for the Arab World Now, which is critical of the kingdom.

"This seems like the beginning of a new wave of sentences and convictions by new judges who have been placed in the specialized criminal court," said Abdullah Alaoudh, DAWN's regional director.

The Freedom Initiative, another Washington-based human rights group, also denounced al-Qahtani's "outrageously long" prison sentence.

"It's very hard to ignore the fact that we are seeing these sentences as (Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman) has received increased legitimacy in the international realm," said Allison McManus, the group's research director.

The social media sentences have renewed attention on Prince Mohammed's crackdown on dissent, even as the ultraconservative Islamic nation has granted women new freedoms like the right to drive.

President Joe Biden traveled to the oil-rich kingdom in July for a meeting with Prince Mohammed, in which he said he confronted him about human rights. Biden came to office vowing to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" over the 2018 killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 Study: blue light screens accelerate aging
SOURCE	https://studyfinds.org/blue-light-screens-aging/
GIST	<p>CORVALLIS, Ore. — Too much blue light from gadgets like televisions, laptops, and smartphones can accelerate the aging process, a new study warns. Researchers found that the light could also lead to the onset of obesity and psychological problems.</p> <p>"Excessive exposure to blue light from everyday devices, such as TVs, laptops, and phones, may have detrimental effects on a wide range of cells in our body, from skin and fat cells, to sensory neurons," says Dr. Jadwiga Giebultowicz, a professor at the Department of Integrative Biology at Oregon State University, in a media release. "We are the first to show that the levels of specific metabolites – chemicals that are essential for cells to function correctly – are altered in fruit flies exposed to blue light."</p> <p>The research team experimented with fruit flies and discovered that the light from screens affected them as well. This is significant, since humans and flies have similarities on a cellular level.</p> <p>"The signaling chemicals in the cells of flies and humans are the same, so there is potential for negative effects of blue light on humans," explains Giebultowicz. "To understand why high-energy blue light is responsible for accelerating aging in fruit flies, we compared the levels of metabolites in flies exposed to blue light for two weeks to those kept in complete darkness."</p> <p>Brain chemicals changed</p> <p>The team found that the cells in fruit flies don't function at an optimal level after exposure to blue light, which they suggest could lead to premature death. Through an examination of the cells in the flies' brains, they discovered that the levels of one metabolite, succinate, increased, while glutamate levels dropped.</p>

“Succinate is essential for producing the fuel for the function and growth of each cell. High levels of succinate after exposure to blue light can be compared to gas being in the pump but not getting into the car,” Giebultowicz says. “Another troubling discovery was that molecules responsible for communication between neurons, such as glutamate, are at the lower level after blue light exposure.”

Low levels of glutamate could result in a [decrease in brain function](#), possibly causing premature aging, according to the study authors. In the world we live in now, blue light seems to be everywhere, and active at all hours of the day.

“LEDs have become the main illumination in display screens such as phones, desktops and TVs, as well as ambient lighting, so humans in advanced societies are exposed to blue light through LED lighting during most of their waking hours,” the study author explains.

Avoid blue light is an ‘anti-aging strategy’

The next step in the research is to study blue light’s [effects on human cells](#).

“We used a fairly strong blue light on the flies – humans are exposed to less intense light, so cellular damage may be less dramatic. The results from this study suggests that future research involving human cells is needed to establish the extent to which human cells may show similar changes in metabolites involved in energy production in response to excessive exposure to blue light,” Giebultowicz concludes.

“Our study suggests that avoidance of excessive blue light exposure may be a good anti-aging strategy.” The study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Aging*, develops on previous research the team has conducted which shows that fruit flies living in constant darkness live longer than those with exposure to light.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 FBI, Kentucky probe \$4M cybercrime theft
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/fbi-secret-service-join-kentucky-investigation-into-4-million-cybercrime-theft/
GIST	<p>The government of Lexington, Kentucky is working with the FBI and Secret Service to investigate \$4 million in federal rent assistance and housing funds allegedly stolen by cybercriminals.</p> <p>In a statement to The Record, Mayor Linda Gorton said the city is already taking internal steps to examine how cybercriminals managed to circumvent the city’s internal wire transfer processes to steal the funds.</p> <p>“The government is a victim of a crime at a time when it is partnering with agencies across the community to provide critical financial assistance,” Gorton said. “Cybercrime is a growing problem around the world. We must be sure government employees are well trained to detect it.”</p> <p>City officials added that they currently do not believe any government employees were involved in the theft but Gorton noted that “this is an active investigation and facts continue to emerge.”</p> <p>Switched accounts</p> <p>Over the weekend, the city went public with the revelation that on Thursday, investigators discovered that a “sophisticated” criminal operation managed to intercept emails between the city and a local community council that needed the funds.</p> <p>It was only then that city officials realized they had not been communicating with the Community Action Council but instead had been emailing with cybercriminals who provided their own bank account and made off with the money.</p> <p>The city ended up sending three wire transfers with about \$4 million to the cybercriminal bank accounts.</p>

The leader of the Lexington Police Department's Financial Crimes Unit, Sgt. Brad Williams, said these kinds of thefts — commonly known as [business email compromise](#) — have become incredibly common and happen “all the time to businesses, universities, non-profits, governments.”

“No one is immune,” he said.

Lexington Commissioner of Finance Erin Hensley said her office worked late into the evening on August 25 to freeze the accounts involved.

City officials are now trying to recover the funds and have suspended all wire transfers to the Community Action Council until the investigation is finished. They are also working with the council to help ensure it is funded.

A city spokesperson told The Record that investigators still do not know which group may have been behind the attack or when the emails were switched.

In May, the FBI [said more than \\$43 billion](#) has been lost through business email compromise and email account compromise scams since 2016 across 241,206 incidents.

BEC scams are popular attacks where hackers compromise legitimate business or personal email accounts through social engineering or computer intrusion before conducting unauthorized transfers of funds.

The FBI noted that there are now variations of the scam involving the theft of employees' personally identifiable information, Wage and Tax Statement (W-2) forms or even cryptocurrency wallets

Andy Gill, senior security consultant at LARES Consulting, said the numbers in the report are likely the low end of the actual figures given that a large number of incidents go unreported.

BEC attacks are often conducted by a threat actor phishing their initial target to gain access to email inboxes, Gill said, noting that from there, they will typically search inboxes for high-value threads, such as discussions with suppliers or discussions with others within the company, to initiate further attacks either against employees or external parties.

State and local governments have [long faced similar attacks](#). In 2019, [the town of Erie, Colo.](#) was scammed out of \$1 million for a bridge project after a fraudster submitted a change of payment request through an online form, according to the *Denver Post*.

In May, Portland, Oregon [had \\$1.4 million in city funds stolen](#) through a fraudulent transaction and just last week, Pennsylvania officials [managed to recover \\$10.3 million](#) of the total \$13 million stolen from a local community school district.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Alert: Evil Corps threatens health sector
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/ransomware-group-blurs-lines-between-crime-state-sponsored-activities-hhs-alert-warns
GIST	<p>The Department of Health and Human Services Cybersecurity Coordination Center warns “Evil Corp should be considered a significant threat to the U.S. health sector.” An HC3 alert details the ongoing risk posed by the highly capable cybercrime syndicate based out of Russia.</p> <p>“It’s entirely plausible Evil Corp could be tasked with acquiring intellectual property from the U.S. health sector” using data exfiltration cyberattacks “at the behest of the Russian government,” according to the alert.</p> <p>Evil Corp first emerged in 2009 and is behind the development and operations of some of the most powerful malware and ransomware variants used in the current threat landscape.</p>

The group's primary "exceptionally aggressive and capable" tactics include ransomware, which means the healthcare sector is among its targets given the nature of the sector's operation and likelihood to pay some form of ransom.

The most effective variant developed by Evil Corp is Dridex: multifunctional malware and one of the most prevalent trojans. Dridex is able to impact the confidentiality and availability of operations data and systems directly related to business operations, including banking and health information.

Not only do the financially motivated actors have a substantial "in-house cyber weapon arsenal," they use their relationships with other cybercriminal groups and the Russian government for access to other prolific malware variants, like [TrickBot](#), [Emotet](#) and Ryuk ransomware.

All of these variants have been known to prolifically target the healthcare sector. In short, Evil Corp blurs the "proverbial lines between cybercriminals and state-sponsored activities" and is "one of the world's most powerful criminal gangs."

"Evil Corp has a wide set of highly capable tools at their disposal," according to the alert. The variants are developed and maintained in-house and "often used in conjunction with commodity malware, living-off-the-land techniques and common security tools designed for legitimate and lawful security assessments."

The actors have repeatedly modified their tactics to [evade U.S. government actions](#) to thwart them and have caused millions of dollars in damage to the U.S. Seventeen of its members were [sanctioned by the Treasury Department](#), and two other members were indicted by the FBI.

For HC3, the concern is that foreign governments, like Russia, "often find it to be more cost effective to steal research and intellectual property via data exfiltration cyberattacks rather than invest time and money into conducting research themselves."

These tactics make the healthcare sector a prime target, given its troves of intellectual property. In terms of targeting, Evil Corp does not discriminate: both large organizations and smaller entities are at risk, as the groups target based on opportunity.

"The extent to which their activities are driven by both personal greed and a state political agenda gives them one of the widest array of potential motivations of all the major cyber threat actors in the world, according to the alert.

The HC3 alert provides in-depth insights into the actors themselves, known variants, tactics, and other pressing issues tied to Evil Corp. However, entities won't find a list of "comprehensive list of defense and mitigations recommendations," as it's impractical given the tremendous amount of customized tactics leveraged and continually developed by Evil Corp.

Instead, HC3 is urging the sector to review past alerts on known Evil Corp variants and overall risk posed by the group, as well as sample mitigations of past attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Crypto miner hides in fake translate apps
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/nitrokod-crypto-miner-microsoft-google-translate/
GIST	<p>Check Point researchers have shared details of a new campaign in which the cybercriminals are distributing cryptocurrency-mining malware. This malware is hard to detect by unsuspecting users because it is distributed through fake and malicious Google Translate and other popular apps.</p> <p>According to researchers, the malware is spread via third-party websites hosted on platforms like Uptodown and Softpedia and offer free software downloads. These websites can be accessed through a simple Google search.</p>

Campaign Analysis

The cryptocurrency mining Trojan is called NitroKod. It is spread disguised as a clean Windows application. The malware keeps its execution on hold for several days or weeks and launches its [Monero mining](#) code when it deems safe.

This malware is readily available, and anyone can use it, stated Check Point's vice president of research, Maya Horowitz. The list of victims is pretty diverse as they are spread across the following countries:

1. Israel
2. Turkey
3. Cyprus
4. Greece
5. Poland
6. Germany
7. Australia
8. Mongolia
9. Sri Lanka
10. United States
11. United Kingdom

Malware analyst at Check Point Moshe Marelus stated that the malware drops around one month after the infection, and dropping files is a multi-stage process, which makes it rather complicated to track its initial stages.

Attack Tactics

The attack is a [multi-stage sequence](#) where each dropper paves the way for another dropper until the actual malware is dropped. The app runs as expected when the user downloads and installs the software loaded with NitroKod malware while the malicious trojan sneakily works in the background. It fetches and stores several executables and schedules one .exe file to run every day once they are unpacked.

When the files are run, another executable file is extracted, which establishes a connection to a C2 server, obtains device configuration settings for the [Monero miner](#) code, and the mining process starts. The generated coins are sent to the attackers' wallets. At some point, all initial stage files self-delete, and the next stage of the infection chain starts after fifteen days through the Windows utility schtasks.exe.

"This way, the first stages of the campaign are separated from the ones that follow, making it very hard to trace the source of the infection chain and block the initial infected applications."

Moshe Marelus – Check Point

The malware also inspects for known virtual machine processes and installed security products. If detected, the program stalls and exits.

One stage also checks for known virtual-machine processes and security products. If found, the program exits. If not, it continues. Cybercriminals use [RAR encrypted, password-protected files](#) throughout the stages to make them hard to detect.

Who Are the Attackers?

CheckPoint's [research](#) suggests that a Turkish-speaking group of hackers dubbed NitroKod is behind this campaign revealed Check Point Research's team. It has been active since 2019. This campaign was discovered in July 2022, and so far, it has affected 111,000 users in 11 countries.

The modus operandi used to trap users is by offering desktop versions of legit apps that don't have their desktop versions. NitroKod programmers wait patiently before launching the malware, and their attacks entail multiple stages.

Software Exploited

	Apart from Google Translate, Nitrokod leveraged other translation apps, e.g., YouTube Music, Microsoft Translator Desktop and MP3 downloader programs. The malicious apps claim to be 100% clean but contain a crypto miner.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Malware hidden in Webb telescope images
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-hide-malware-in-james-webb-telescope-images/
GIST	<p>Threat analysts have spotted a new malware campaign dubbed ‘GO#WEBBFUSCATOR’ that relies on phishing emails, malicious documents, and space images from the James Webb telescope to spread malware.</p> <p>The malware is written in Golang, a programming language that is gaining popularity among cybercriminals because it is cross-platform (Windows, Linux, Mac) and offers increased resistance to reverse engineering and analysis.</p> <p>In the recent campaign discovered by researchers at Securonix, the threat actor drops payloads that are currently not marked as malicious by antivirus engines on the VirusTotal scanning platform.</p> <p>Infection chain</p> <p>The infection starts with a phishing email with an attached malicious document, “Geos-Rates.docx”, which downloads a template file.</p> <p>That file contains an obfuscated VBS macro that auto-executes if macros are enabled in the Office suite.</p> <p>The code then downloads a JPG image (“OxB36F8GEEC634.jpg”) from a remote resource (“xmlschemeformat[.com]”), decodes it into an executable (“msdllupdate.exe”) using certutil.exe, and launches it.</p> <p>In an image viewer, the .JPG shows the galaxy cluster SMACS 0723, published by NASA in July 2022. However, if opened with a text editor, the image reveals additional content disguised as an included certificate, which is a Base64-encoded payload that turns into the malicious 64-bit executable.</p> <p>The payload’s strings are further obfuscated using ROT25, while the binary uses XOR to hide the Golang assemblies from analysts. On top of that, the assemblies use case alteration to avoid signature-based detection by security tools.</p> <p>Malware functions</p> <p>Based on what could be deduced via dynamic malware analysis, the executable achieves persistence by copying itself to ‘%%localappdata%%\microsoft\vault\’ and adding a new registry key.</p> <p>Upon execution, the malware establishes a DNS connection to the command and control (C2) server and sends encrypted queries.</p> <p>“The encrypted messages are read in and unencrypted on the C2 server, thus revealing its original contents,” explains Securonix in the report.</p> <p>“In the case with GO#WEBBFUSCATOR, communication with the C2 server is implemented using ‘TXT-DNS’ requests using ‘nslookup’ requests to the attacker-controlled name server. All information is encoded using Base64.”</p> <p>The C2 may respond to the malware by setting time intervals between connection requests, changing the nslookup timeout, or sending out commands to execute through the Windows cmd.exe tool.</p> <p>During testing, Securonix observed the threat actors running arbitrary enumeration commands on its test systems, a standard first reconnaissance step.</p>

	The researchers note that the domains used for the campaign were registered recently, the oldest one on May 29, 2022.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Calif. sweeping online child safety code
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/business/california-children-online-safety.html
GIST	<p>Social media and game platforms often use recommendation algorithms, find-a-friend tools, smartphone notices and other enticements to keep people glued online. But the same techniques may pose risks to scores of children who have flocked to online services that were not specifically designed for them.</p> <p>Now California lawmakers have passed the first statute in the nation requiring apps and sites to install guardrails for users younger than 18. The new rules would compel many online services to curb the risks that certain popular features — like allowing strangers to message one another — may pose to child users.</p> <p>The bill, the California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act, could herald a shift in the way lawmakers regulate the tech industry. Rather than wade into heated political battles over online content, the legislation takes a practical, product-safety approach. It aims to hold online services to the same kinds of basic safety standards as the automobile industry — essentially requiring apps and sites to install the digital equivalent of seat belts and air bags for younger users.</p> <p>“The digital ecosystem is not safe by default for children,” said Buffy Wicks, a Democrat in the state Assembly who co-sponsored the bill with a Republican colleague, Jordan Cunningham. “We think the Kids’ Code, as we call it, would make tech safer for children by essentially requiring these companies to better protect them.”</p> <p>The state Senate passed the bill Monday evening by a vote of 33-0. The state Assembly had already approved a version of the bill. It now requires approval by Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has not taken a public stance on the measure.</p> <p>The new rules tap into a national debate over the potentially deleterious effect that social media platforms may have on the mental health and body images of some young people.</p> <p>Instagram in particular has come under heightened scrutiny. Last fall, members of Congress examined how the social network’s automated recommendation engine had served graphic images of self-harm to teenage girls as well as content promoting eating disorders to younger users. Soon after, President Joe Biden called for greater child safety on social media.</p> <p>Some companies have faced criticism for exploiting children’s data. In 2019, Google and the operators of Musical.ly, the popular video-sharing app now known as TikTok, each agreed to pay multimillion-dollar federal fines to settle charges that they had illegally collected personal information from children without parental permission.</p> <p>Federal regulators said Google had profited by using children’s data to target them with ads on YouTube. Separately, regulators complained that Musical.ly had made children’s profile photos and other sensitive details public by default, saying the practice could have enabled adult strangers to contact younger users.</p> <p>Proponents of the California bill say the new rules should reduce such risks while promoting children’s autonomy and well-being online.</p> <p>Critics in the industry say the legislation is overly broad and could subject many more online services than necessary to burdensome rules.</p>

The scope of the California legislation far exceeds federal safeguards for youngsters online. A federal law, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, narrowly protects the privacy of users younger than 13 — and then only when they use online services aimed at youngsters, such as children's video apps.

California is already a pioneer in children's online safety and data privacy, enacting protections over the past decade that dozens of other states have replicated. Now it has become the first state to pass a bill requiring general-audience sites and apps "likely to be accessed" by children to install basic protections for users younger than 18.

"Children should be afforded protections not only by online products and services specifically directed at them," the statute reads, "but by all online products and services they are likely to access."

The California bill would require online services for general audiences to proactively design their products and features to protect child users. In practice, that means apps and sites must analyze and mitigate the risks that their services may pose to minors — like exposing them to explicit content or using manipulative techniques to prod them to spend hours on end online.

The legislation also requires online services to turn on the highest privacy settings by default for minors. And it prohibits online platforms from collecting children's precise locations without "providing an obvious sign to the child" while their whereabouts are being tracked.

The new rules, which would take effect in 2024, could prompt some online services to introduce nationwide changes, rather than treat minors in California differently.

The California statute takes many of its cues from Britain, where regulators put comprehensive online protections for minors into effect in 2021. British officials have said their effort, called the Children's Code, was intended to set baseline safety standards, like preventing adult strangers from contacting children or disabling social media features that could show a child's exact location on a map to other users.

Designers of the British code said they also wanted to limit manipulative practices — like barraging children with notifications at all hours or automatically playing videos one after the other — that could get young users hooked on social media and game platforms.

"We all as a society have to start actually setting a floor," said Beeban Kidron, a member of the House of Lords who spearheaded the British effort and is the founder of the 5Rights Foundation, a digital rights group for children. "Let's stop introducing adults to children or putting children on a map so you can see where they are. Don't notify kids all through the night. Turn off autoplay."

The California code could apply to many other online services that children are likely to use: game platforms, connected toys, voice-activated digital assistants and virtual-reality apps. The bill could also affect popular education services like Google Classroom, a school assignment portal used by millions of children, whose privacy policy says it collects information about users' locations.

Opponents of the children's code said the wide mandate could pose problems for businesses. Among the most visible critics: the California Chamber of Commerce and TechNet, a tech industry association whose members include Amazon, Apple, Cisco, Google, Oracle, Pinterest, Snap and Meta, the social media giant formerly known as Facebook.

Industry groups pressed California lawmakers to narrow the bill's definition of a "child" to a person younger than 16 — rather than a minor younger than 18. They also argued that the scope of the bill was too broad and its provisions too vague to carry out.

"The requirement that companies consider the 'best interests' of children is incredibly difficult to interpret," TechNet and the Chamber of Commerce wrote in a letter to legislators in April. In a similar

letter in June, industry groups said the bill's broad focus on online services "likely to be accessed" by children would subject "far more websites and platforms than necessary" to the bill's requirements.

Civil liberties experts raised concerns about another issue: consumer privacy. In particular, they warned that the requirement for general-audience sites to provide greater protections for children could lead to unintended consequences for adults.

"Such a system would likely lead platforms to set up elaborate age-verification systems for everyone, meaning that all users would have to submit personal data and submit to more corporate surveillance," the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group, wrote to legislators in April.

The News/Media Alliance, a trade group representing 2,000 publishers including The New York Times, has also lobbied for changes, saying the language of the bill could require newspapers and magazines to undertake costly changes like instituting age verification for online readers or creating different versions of articles for minors.

Legislators have made changes to accommodate industry concerns. For one, they added a provision giving companies a grace period to fix violations after receiving notice from regulators.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 TA423 targets firms in South China Sea
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/chinese-hackers-target-energy-firms-south-china-sea
GIST	<p>The Chinese APT known as TA423 (aka Red Ladon, APT40 and Leviathan) has been operating a cyberespionage campaign across Australia, Malaysia and Europe. The campaign has had three distinct phases – the latest from April 2022 to mid-June 2022. The primary targets have been Australian organizations and energy exploration in the South China Sea.</p> <p>TA423 has been active since 2013, with previous targets including defense contractors, manufacturers, universities, government agencies, legal firms involved in diplomatic disputes, and foreign companies involved with Australasian policy or South China Sea operations. The focus is on areas of geopolitical interest to the Chinese government.</p> <p>In July 2021, the US government indicted four Chinese nationals (three of whom it said were provincial officers in China's Ministry of State Security) for APT40-related cyberespionage.</p> <p>The latest operation, reported by Proofpoint with assistance from PwC, involved phishing campaigns designed to lure victims to a malicious website designed as an Australian news site. The site delivered the ScanBox reconnaissance and exploitation framework first analyzed by AlienVault in 2014, and believed to be used by several different Chinese threat groups.</p> <p>Targets received messages from email addresses created by the threat actor asking the recipient to visit a false website for the fictional Australian Morning News. The site used genuine news stories lifted from sources such as Reuters and the BBC. Targets who visited the website were served with ScanBox.</p> <p>ScanBox delivers JavaScript code either as a single block or, as here, as a plugin-based modular architecture. The primary payload sets its configuration including the information to be gathered, and the C2 server to be contacted. It harvests detailed data on the browser being used.</p> <p>Subsequent ScanBox plugins delivered to the victim include a keylogger, browser plugin identification, browser fingerprinting, a peer connection plugin (avoiding the need to communicate through NATs, firewalls and other security solutions), and a security check for Kaspersky Internet Security (KIS).</p> <p>The latest campaign is phase 3 of an ongoing campaign primarily targeting Australia and Malaysia. From March 2021, Proofpoint observed focused TA423 targeting these countries and offshore energy firms. At that time (phase 1) the phishing campaign involved weaponized RTF attachments that ultimately retrieved versions of Meterpreter shellcode.</p>

	<p>The Australian targets included military academic institutions, and federal government, defense and public health sectors. The Malaysian targets included offshore drilling and deep-water energy exploration firms, and global marketing and finance companies. Other global companies targeted may have been part of the supply chain for the energy firms.</p> <p>Phase 2 occurred in March 2022. It used RTF template injection attachments which returned a macro-laden Microsoft Word document. Although Proofpoint has not yet been able to retrieve the payload, observation of similar weaponized RTF files suggests the delivery of a DLL downloader that delivers an XOR encoded Meterpreter payload response.</p> <p>The latest campaign, phase 3, is effectively a phishing/watering hole campaign that delivers a customized version of ScanBox.</p> <p>The three phases are considered by Proofpoint and PwC threat analysts to be part of a continuous and ongoing sustained phishing campaign targeting Malaysia and Australia and attributed to TA423 (APT40). The attacks appear to be directed against targets of strategic importance to China in a time of heightened geopolitical tensions.</p> <p>TA423 is thought to operate out of China's Hainan Island in the South China Sea – the most southern point of China, The US government indictment of four Chinese nationals linked the group to the Chinese Hainan Province Ministry of State Security. However, the indictment appears to have had no effect on the operations of the group. Both Proofpoint and PwC expect TA423 (APT 40) to continue its espionage activities targeting countries in the South China Sea, and further intrusions in Australia, Europe and the US.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Classified threat briefings industry sectors
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/white-house-classified-threat-briefings-critical-infrastructure/
GIST	<p>The White House has been conducting classified cybersecurity briefings with executives from select critical infrastructure sectors as part of an ongoing effort to compel industry leaders to invest more in their digital defenses.</p> <p>The next meeting, scheduled for September, will be with executives from across the aviation industry, a senior White House cybersecurity official told CyberScoop.</p> <p>The Biden administration's effort to increase industry support for upgrades to critical infrastructure formally launched last summer when the president signed a national security memorandum assigning federal agencies to develop cybersecurity performance goals for various critical infrastructure initiatives.</p> <p>Since then, senior White House officials have been quietly meeting with executives and leaders of trade groups as it works to shape forthcoming cybersecurity regulations for critical infrastructure operators.</p> <p>So far, the threat briefings have proven highly effective, Anne Neuberger, Biden's deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging tech, told CyberScoop in an interview earlier this month.</p> <p>"This way they are able to see the issues through the same lens as us," said Neuberger, who is leading the briefings. "For the private sector, it's a cost; for the government, it's a commitment to not allow a foreign actor to disrupt critical services. ... If a company is operating a water facility serving 50,000 Americans in Florida, we can all agree that following these mandates are critical to ensuring continuity in the event of an attempted cyber breach."</p> <p>Neuberger added that the threat briefings underscore the administration's commitment to come to "a reasonable compromise once everyone is working off the same intelligence."</p>

The upcoming meeting with aviation officials follows years of documented hacker attempts to breach aviation entities. In February, the cybersecurity firm [Proofpoint published research showing](#) a “consistent, active cybercrime threat” to the aviation sector since at least 2017.

The meeting with aviation officials will closely follow another recent White House briefing tailored for specific transportation sector executives. Railroad executives from across the country came to the White House for an Aug. 4 classified briefing on cyberthreats targeting their industry as well, Neuberger said.

Ted Greener, a spokesperson for the Association of American Railroads (AAR), told CyberScoop that executives from five of the seven largest American railroads attended Neuberger’s White House briefing. Norfolk Southern Corporation and Union Pacific — the country’s largest railroad company [with \\$6.5 billion in revenue last year](#) — were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts, Greener said.

“The railroad industry appreciates the administration’s commitment to sharing intelligence and security information,” Greener said in a prepared statement. “In follow-up, we have arranged through the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the same briefing to be provided to railroads’ chief information security officers and cybersecurity leads.”

Greener said that the White House focus on helping companies execute on the administration’s cybersecurity mandates has ensured that the government’s “desired outcomes are met in the context of the proactive and comprehensive efforts focused on continuously enhancing cybersecurity that railroads have maintained for more than two decades.”

He added that the White House acknowledged the industry’s “sustained commitment” during the briefing. Neuberger said that in addition to providing rail officials with a classified threat briefing she also showed the railroad executives the draft of a revised TSA directive for how they can improve the sector’s cyber readiness.

“We highlighted that we’re open to hearing their concerns and input, but that we had a responsibility to set a cybersecurity standard that was adequate against the threats they had just heard about,” Neuberger said of the briefing. “I think most Americans would be surprised to learn that minimum mandatory cyber standards are not in place in most sectors, including critical manufacturing, hospital networks and water plants, which is why the president has put such a relentless focus on improving the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure.”

Under the directive, [major passenger and freight railroads](#) are required to report cybersecurity breaches quickly; appoint a cybersecurity coordinator; draft an incident response plan; and conduct a review of operations to formally assess cyber vulnerabilities. The administration’s emphasis on critical infrastructure cyber defense follows [last spring’s ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline](#), the nation’s largest oil pipeline.

President Biden launched the administration’s [industrial control system](#) cybersecurity initiative last April, with an initial focus on more than 150 electric utilities representing almost 90 million customers. A month later, the Colonial Pipeline attack stunned government officials and triggered what Neuberger told CyberScoop is meant to strengthen “the digital alarm system and locks” that will better protect critical infrastructure against cyberattacks.

“This is obviously a huge task, so we are working sector by sector in a very structured approach,” Neuberger said.

The administration is in the third stage of its work on the initiative, she said, having already identified both cyberdefense gaps and critical companies in each sector. Now, Neuberger said, the threat briefings are a key component of step three, which she described as “working with lead agencies and owners and operators of critical infrastructure to put the cybersecurity requirements in place.”

	<p>Neuberger’s threat briefings began last year when oil and gas pipeline executives came to the White House in three groups due to the size of the sector. After a series of meetings with officials, Neuberger said last month that TSA recently issued revised guidelines for the oil and gas sector.</p> <p>She told an audience at the Center for a New American Security last month that the briefings have focused on “how we see China or Russia potentially disrupting railroads in the country.” At the time, she said the railroad briefing that took place earlier this month would also focus on how a cyberattack could compromise hazardous materials railroads transport.</p> <p>Neuberger told the CNAS audience that her work protecting critical infrastructure is so vital to her that she keeps a picture of a Pittsburgh bridge that collapsed in January in her office to remind her “where smart can make a difference.”</p> <p>“Triaging of the problem is something tech can do for us,” she said at the time.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 IT Army of Ukraine: digital resistance
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/inside-the-it-army-of-ukraine-a-hub-for-digital-resistance/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian cyber officials claim hundreds of thousands of people from around the world have volunteered to be part of a pick-up cyber force they call the IT Army of Ukraine.</p> <p><i>Click Here</i> spoke to one of their key administrators at the start of the war and now we check back in with him six months later. In the intervening months, the IT Army has been part of what the head of the UK’s signals intelligence branch, GCHQ, has called “the most effective defensive cyber activity in history.”</p> <p>Working with other hacker groups around the world – from Anonymous to Squad 303 out of Poland – the IT Army of Ukraine hacked Russia’s Davos meeting – delaying President Vladimir Putin’s opening address for more than an hour – released military plans, and interrupted Russia’s central television news with their own dispatches from the war.</p> <p>The latest episode of the <i>Click Here</i> podcast includes an extended sitdown with a high ranking member of the force — <i>Click Here</i> agreed to withhold his identity for safety reasons. The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.</p> <p>CLICK HERE: How has the IT Army of Ukraine changed since the invasion began? IT ADMIN: It’s changed drastically. At the start of the war, we had a problem of trust. It still haunts us. It’s hard to share some crucial information with the people you don’t trust. But the situation we’re all in with the war has made all of us work together. We have become a hub for digital resistance here in Ukraine.</p> <p>We’ve connected more than a few groups together. We’ve connected many talented individuals to join and help us build tools and manage our activity as we search for new targets. We’ve become much bigger and better.</p> <p>CH: One of the things that you were concerned about at the beginning of the war was coordination between various members of the IT Army. Have you worked that out? IT: Yes, we have more members. We’ve become some sort of IT company with management. We hire people. We all know our responsibilities and tasks. We have people in charge, but it’s not like one person manages the entire IT Army.</p> <p>CH: And how big is the core group of leaders? IT: If we’re talking about decision makers, it’s around 25 people.</p> <p>CH: Are they all Ukrainian?</p>

IT: Yes.

CH: So the control of the IT Army is in the hands of Ukrainian professionals?

IT: Yes.

CH: So, how big are you now?

IT: It's usually better to be quiet about the numbers.

CH: As of mid-August, you have more than 231,000 followers on the main IT Army Telegram page. Can you give me an idea of how much bigger you are than six months ago?

IT: I am not exaggerating when I tell you we've doubled in size.

CH: From all over the world?

IT: Yes. We still have more users from Ukraine because it's our war, it's our problem. But it's always nice to see people joining from other sides of the world, cheering for us and trying to do their best to help. This global support has even changed my understanding of the world. I thought people were usually more focused on themselves and their problems, but I see a lot of good, brave people volunteering with the IT Army.

CH: Are you worried about Russian spies?

IT: Yeah. But the most important question here is what sort of information do they have? If they know about a planned DDoS attack, then we can change the targets pretty easily and pretty fast. If we're talking about some hacking, then they're not aware of it. We are not actively sharing our internal processes with outsiders.

CH: How are you picking your targets?

IT: We have a dedicated team that is busy looking for valuable Russian targets like government, organizations, websites, and infrastructure. Some of these attacks are meant to wake up the Russian people to make them think their government is doing something wrong.

CH: Is there a memorable attack carried out by the IT Army that sticks out to you?

IT: Maybe you heard about Vladimir Putin speaking at the World Economic Forum this summer in Saint Petersburg. His [speech was delayed because of a cyber attack](#). We made the attack there. That's the biggest thing connected to the IT Army.

CH: So, you want to change the conversation about the war.

IT: Even if it's 1%, we will be happy, but I think it's bigger.

CH: The last time we spoke, we were waiting for the Russians to launch some sort of cyber offensive and it never really came. And some experts think that's because of people like you and the IT Army that you've kept the Russians busy defending themselves, so they can't attack. Do you see signs of that?

IT: I think it's not the only thing that's kept us safe in the digital space, but in my opinion the IT Army is working.

CH: Do you have an operation that you're most proud of over the last six months where you thought we really made a difference?

IT: Maybe the most significant for me is how we grow our operations in the Russian Federation. There are some controversial ones.

CH: One of the other operations the IT Army has talked about in its Telegram channel is how it sent photos of dead Russian soldiers to those families. It [said it used AI technology to gather this information](#). Were you involved with that?

IT: I can't tell you about this.

CH: Have you heard about it?

IT: I've heard about it, but I'm not competent to represent the IT Army regarding this because it may be harmful for us. That's why I'm not going to answer.

CH: What is the thing you think outsiders most misunderstand about the IT Army?

IT: The most misunderstandings are coming from people without actual technical background or knowledge. From time to time, we have people who are contacting us with some ridiculous ideas that they think are easy to execute and will drastically help us and win the war. They have no idea why we aren't doing what they want.

CH: Do you feel that the Ukrainian government is doing a good job in cyberspace defending the nation?

IT: I believe so.

CH: And if you were to look ahead between now and the end of the year, how do you think things will unfold?

IT: That's a difficult question you asked me because as a person who lives in a country in wartime, I don't want to make any assumptions. I believe we will be victorious. We will take back all our lands, and all the other territories that we lost. I'm not sure that it'll happen by the end of the year because from what I can see, Russia is solely preparing for a long term war.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Chrome extensions steal browsing data
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chrome-extensions-with-14-million-installs-steal-browsing-data/
GIST	<p>Threat analysts at McAfee found five Google Chrome extensions that steal track users' browsing activity. Collectively, the extensions have been downloaded more than 1.4 million times.</p> <p>The purpose of the malicious extensions is to monitor when users visit e-commerce website and to modify the visitor's cookie to appear as if they came through a referrer link. For this, the authors of the extensions get an affiliate fee for any purchases at electronic shops.</p> <p>The five malicious extensions that McAfee researchers discovered are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Netflix Party (mmnbenhknklpbendgmngngeaignppnbe) – 800,000 downloads• Netflix Party 2 (flijfnhifgdcbhglkneplegafminjnhn) – 300,000 downloads• Full Page Screenshot Capture – Screenshotting (pojgkmkfincpdkdgjepkmdekcahmckjp) – 200,000 downloads• FlipShope – Price Tracker Extension (adikhbfjdbjkhelbdnffogkobkekkkej) – 80,000 downloads• AutoBuy Flash Sales (gbnahglfafmhaehbdmjedfhdmmimjcbed) – 20,000 downloads <p>It is worth noting that the above extensions still feature the promised functionality, making it more difficult for victims to notice the malicious activity. Although using them does not impact users directly, they are a severe privacy risk.</p> <p>Thus, if you are using any of the listed extensions, even if you find their functionality useful, it is recommended to remove them from your browser immediately.</p> <p>How the extensions work</p> <p>All five extensions discovered by McAfee have a similar behavior. The web app manifest ("manifest.json" file), which dictates how the extension should behave on the system, loads a multifunctional script (B0.js) that sends the browsing data to a domain the attackers control ("langhort[.]com").</p> <p>The data is delivered through via POST requests each time the user visits a new URL. The info reaching the fraudster includes the URL in base64 form, the user ID, device location (country, city, zip code), and an encoded referral URL.</p>

	<p>If the visited website matches any entries on a list of websites for which the extension author has an active affiliation, the server responds to B0.js with one of two possible functions.</p> <p>The first one, "Result['c'] – passf_url ", orders the script to insert the provided URL (referral link) as an iframe on the visited website.</p> <p>The second, "Result['e'] setCookie", orders B0.js to modify the cookie or replace it with the provided one if the extension has been granted with the associated permissions to perform this action.</p> <p>To evade detection, analysis, and to confuse researchers or vigilant users, some of the extensions feature a delay of 15 days from the time of their installation before they start sending out the browser activity.</p> <p>At the time of writing this, "Full Page Screenshot Capture – Screenshotting" and "FlipShope – Price Tracker Extension" are still available on the Chrome Web Store.</p> <p>The two Netflix Party extensions have been removed from the store, but this doesn't delete them from web browsers, so users should take manual action to uninstall them.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 'Agenda' ransomware customized attacks
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/golang-ransomware-agenda/
GIST	<p>A new piece of targeted ransomware created in the Go programming language has been customized for maximum impact against individual victims.</p> <p>Security analysts from Trend Micro outlined the new threat in an advisory they published on Thursday following direct attacks against one of the company's customers.</p> <p>"Malware written in the Go language (aka Golang) has become common among threat actors," reads the document. "One possible reason for this uptick in popularity is that Go statically compiles necessary libraries, making security analysis much harder."</p> <p>Incidentally, while Golang is still a popular programming language for ransomware, some actors, including BlackCat, are now moving to Rust.</p> <p>As for the Agenda ransomware, Trend Micro said the threat targeted healthcare and education organizations in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Thailand.</p> <p>From a technical standpoint, Agenda reportedly offers several features, including rebooting systems in safe mode, attempting to stop many server-specific processes and services, and having multiple modes to run. The ransomware uses AES-256 for encrypting files and RSA-2048 for encrypting the generated key.</p> <p>Additionally, the samples of the ransomware the security firm collected were customized for each victim. The ransom amount requested, for instance, was different for each company, ranging from \$50,000 to \$800,000.</p> <p>"Our investigation showed that the samples had leaked accounts, customer passwords, and unique company IDs used as extensions of encrypted files," Trend Micro added.</p> <p>Because of the highly-informed nature of these attacks, the antivirus company believed that the ransomware group offers affiliates options to customize configurable binary payloads for each victim. "[These include] details such as company ID, RSA key, and processes and services to kill before the data encryption."</p>

	<p>Further, Trend Micro warned that Agenda has techniques for evading detection by taking advantage of a device's 'safe mode' feature to proceed with its encryption routine unseen.</p> <p>"The ransomware also takes advantage of local accounts to log on as spoofed users and execute the ransomware binary, further encrypting other machines if the logon attempt is successful. It also terminates numerous processes and services and ensures persistence by injecting a DLL into svchost.exe."</p> <p>To defend against Agenda, Trend Micro recommended the use of multifactor authentication (MFA) solutions, the 3-2-1 rule when backing up important files and the regular patching and updating of systems.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Phishing campaign targets PyPI users
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/phishing-campaign-targets-pypi-users-to-distribute-malicious-code
GIST	<p>A phishing campaign is targeting users of the Python Package Index (PyPI) by threatening to remove their code packages if they don't put it through a bogus validation process, PyPI administrators have warned.</p> <p>PyPI administrators are alerting users about the repository — which enables Python developers to publish and find code packages to use for building software — of emails that claim they are implementing a "mandatory 'validation' process," they said in a series of tweets outlining how the scam works.</p> <p>The messages invite PyPI users to follow a link to perform the validation "or otherwise risk the package being removed from PyPI." The administrators assured users in a post that they would never remove a valid project from the index, and they only take down projects that are found to be malicious or violate the company's terms of service.</p> <p>The campaign, which the administrators said is the first of its kind, steals users credentials to load compromised packages to the repository. The administrators noted that the phishing campaign does not target code repositories as a way to spread malware through the software supply chain.</p> <p>The attackers behind the scam already have successfully stolen credentials from several PyPI users and uploaded malware into the projects they maintain to serve as the latest release for those projects, according to PyPI.</p> <p>"These releases have been removed from PyPI and the maintainer accounts have been temporarily frozen," according to PyPI's Twitter post.</p> <p>How the Scam Works</p> <p>According to PyPI, the initial phishing message dangles the lure that Google is behind the validation process of new and existing PyPI packages. Ironically, the message claims the new process is due to "a surge in malicious packages being uploaded to the PyPI.org domain."</p> <p>The link takes the user to a phishing site that mimics PyPI's login page, which steals any credentials entered through a phishing site, "sites[dot]google[dot]com/view/pypivalidate." The data is sent to a URL on the domain "linkedopports[dot]com," according to PyPI.</p> <p>PyPI administrators have been unable to determine whether the phishing site was designed to relay TOTP-based two-factor codes but noted that accounts protected by hardware security keys are not vulnerable to the attack.</p> <p>Repository administrators are in the process of actively reviewing reports of new malicious releases and ensuring that they are removed so the accounts that have been compromised are restored and their maintainers can continue to use PyPI.</p> <p>Supply Chain in the Crosshairs</p>

The campaign bucks the trend where threat actors are targeting public code repositories to distribute malware to the software supply chain. Flawed code can be a goldmine for threat actors, expansively widening the impact of malicious campaigns when compromised code is built into numerous applications or websites without developers or users knowing.

The [Log4J case](#) — in which a flaw in a widely used Java logging tool affected millions of applications, many of which [are still vulnerable](#) — brought this to light in a big way, and threat actors recently have ramped up attacks on code repositories as a way to spread malicious code quickly through the supply chain.

Earlier this month, [PyPI removed 10 malicious code packages](#) from the registry after a security vendor informed it about the issue. Threat actors targeted the registry by embedding malicious code into the [package installation script](#).

PyPI has been aware of the target on its back and in the past few years has enacted [several security initiatives](#) to better protect its users.

These measures include the [addition of two-factor authentication \(2FA\)](#) as a login option and API tokens for uploading software to the registry, a [dependency resolver](#) to ensure the pip package installer installs the right versions of package dependencies, and the [creation of databases](#) of known Python vulnerabilities in PyPI projects.

Thwarting the Attack

PyPI is currently working to make 2FA more prevalent across projects on the repository, administrators said, adding that PyPI users with 2FA already implemented should reset recovery codes if they think that their account has been compromised.

To avoid being phished altogether, PyPI users should confirm that the URL in the address bar of any email purporting to come from PyPI is <http://pypi.org> and that the site's TLS certificate is issued to <http://pypi.org>. Users also should consider using a browser-integrated password manager, administrators tweeted.

Enabling 2FA by using hardware security keys or WebAuthn 2FA also can help PyPI users avoid being compromised by phishing attempts, they said. In fact, to help facilitate better protection, the repository currently offers free hardware keys for maintainers of the top 1% of projects.

PyPI advised any users who think they've been compromised to contact security@pypi.org with details about the sender email address and URL of the malicious site to help administrators to respond to this issue.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Hackers use ModernLoader; infect systems
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/08/hackers-use-modernloader-to-infect.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>As many as three disparate but related campaigns between March and Jun 2022 have been found to deliver a variety of malware, including ModernLoader, RedLine Stealer, and cryptocurrency miners onto compromised systems.</p> <p>"The actors use PowerShell, .NET assemblies, and HTA and VBS files to spread across a targeted network, eventually dropping other pieces of malware, such as the SystemBC trojan and DCRat, to enable various stages of their operations," Cisco Talos researcher Vanja Svajcer said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>The malicious implant in question, ModernLoader, is designed to provide attackers with remote control over the victim's machine, which enables the adversaries to deploy additional malware, steal sensitive information, or even ensnare the computer in a botnet.</p>

Cisco Talos attributed the infections to a previously undocumented but Russian-speaking threat actor, citing the use of off-the-shelf tools. Potential targets included Eastern European users in Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Russia.

Infection chains discovered by the cybersecurity firm involve attempts to compromise vulnerable web applications like WordPress and CPanel to distribute the malware by means of files that masquerade as fake Amazon gift cards.

The first stage payload is a HTML Application (HTA) file that runs a PowerShell script hosted on the command-and-control (C2) server to initiate the deployment of intertim payloads that ultimately inject the malware using a technique called [process hollowing](#).

Described as a simple .NET remote access trojan, ModernLoader (aka Avatar bot) is equipped with features to gather system information, execute arbitrary commands, or download and run a file from the C2 server, allowing the adversary to alter the modules in real-time.

Cisco's investigation also unearthed two earlier campaigns in March 2022 with similar modus operandi that leverage ModerLoader as the primary malware C2 communications and serve additional malware, including XMRIg, RedLine Stealer, SystemBC, DCRat, and a Discord token stealer, among others.

"These campaigns portray an actor experimenting with different technology," Svajcer said. "The usage of ready-made tools shows that the actor understands the TTPs required for a successful malware campaign but their technical skills are not developed enough to fully develop their own tools."

[Return to Top](#)

Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Afghans as security risks not fully vetted?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/30/feds-cant-say-what-happened-afghan-evacuees-us-who/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration is still allowing Afghans to reach the U.S. without checking them through a key Defense Department database that could help weed out national security risks, according to senators.</p> <p>Wednesday marks a year since the end of the final U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, yet lawmakers say they still haven't received a full accounting of what happened in the chaos — including who, exactly, made it out of the country.</p> <p>Those who are tracking the matter say there are plenty of worrying signs.</p> <p>"Some of them have no IDs, some of them are created on the spot using whatever they said their name was," one Senate investigator said. "What we know is frightening. And what we know we don't know is absolutely overwhelming."</p> <p>As an example, he pointed to the startling number of Afghans who are now listed with Jan. 1 birthdays.</p> <p>It turns out that exact birth dates don't have much importance in Afghanistan. American authorities vetting the tens of thousands of evacuees last year just assigned them a New Year's Day birthday for the year that corresponded to their age, congressional staffers revealed.</p> <p>An unusual number of Afghans gave their birthday as Sept. 11 — the date of the 2001 terrorist attacks that left nearly 3,000 Americans dead and sparked the 20-year U.S. war in Afghanistan.</p> <p>"There are people within this population that think that's cute," the Senate investigator said.</p> <p>It's more than bad taste.</p>

Now that date is in government databases as their official birthdates. Thanks to legislation Congress passed, Afghans are allowed to get a Real ID-compliant identification with that fake birthday.

Analysts warned that if the development of information eventually fingers someone as a security risk, it might no longer match the information about that person in the U.S.

Some 81,000 Afghans have made it to the U.S. under Operation Allies Welcome. That includes about 77,000 who were airlifted out of Afghanistan in July and August of last year and 4,000 who have arrived since then.

Of the 77,000, a Pentagon watchdog reported this year that as of November, 50 of those who reached the U.S. were later found to have been flagged in the Defense Department's Automated Biometric Identification System. That's a key database with information taken from the battlefield — such as fingerprints found on a roadside IED or at an ISIS cave — that suggests someone was involved in nefarious activities against the U.S.

The Homeland Security Department lacked access to the system, so it wasn't checking Afghan evacuees.

The Defense Department, worried about having those folks at staging camps at U.S. military bases, belatedly performed the checks and identified the 50.

Sen. Josh Hawley, Missouri Republican, revealed this summer that the number had grown to at least 66.

The Defense Department inspector general said less than 10% of those flagged "could be located" at one point. The audit called that "a potential security risk."

FBI Director Christopher A. Wray suggested to senators at a hearing in early August that his agents have been working to stop some illegal activity.

"I know there have been a number of interviews of individuals who came. Lots of interviews, frankly, of individuals who came as part of the evacuation," he said. "I think there have been a number of disruptions, whether — how many of those have been arrests, under what charges and so forth, that I'd have to get back to you on."

After Mr. Wray's testimony, senators revealed that Homeland Security, which is responsible for vetting the new arrivals, is not consistently checking Afghans through ABIS.

"They don't have access for that for their ongoing screening for all the new evacuees and refugees being brought out of Afghanistan," said one person familiar with a July 14 briefing that the FBI gave to Senate offices.

Homeland Security didn't answer specific questions about the status of ABIS screening but defended the checks that are conducted.

"Afghan evacuees undergo a multi-layered, rigorous screening and vetting process that begins overseas and is conducted by intelligence, law enforcement and counterterrorism professionals," the department said in response to questions.

The department said those flagged as risks before they arrived were blocked from entering.

Those who do reach the U.S. also undergo "recurrent vetting," the department said, though it didn't say what that entails.

The FBI can't say exactly what happened to everyone who was flagged.

“We have a lot of information about where people are located. I can’t sit here right now and tell you that we know where all are located at any given time,” Mr. Wray told senators at the August hearing.

That “does not inspire confidence,” Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio, Charles E. Grassley of Iowa and James M. Inhofe of Oklahoma said in a joint letter to Mr. Wray on Aug. 22.

The three men, respectively the top Republicans on the Senate Homeland Security, Judiciary and Armed Services committees, said the July briefing contained important information about the Afghans who were flagged, but it’s been deemed “classified.”

“The American people deserve answers about President Biden’s decision to parole individuals into the country without adequate screening and to understand the FBI’s role in assessing and investigating these security concerns,” the senators wrote.

The airlift was billed as a chance to rescue allies who assisted America’s 20-year war effort.

Homeland Security says roughly half of the 81,000 who have made it to the U.S. are believed to qualify for the special visa that covers Afghan allies.

Others are Afghan relatives of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. Some evacuees were part of civil society efforts but were not specifically tied to the U.S. military.

Some had no real ties to the U.S. but were lucky enough to get through the Taliban’s cordon around the airport in the weeks before the final withdrawal, investigators said.

Almost all of the Afghans were brought to the U.S. through what’s known as “parole,” a special power the Homeland Security secretary has to admit people who otherwise would have no legal right to be in the country.

The parole lasts for two years.

A bipartisan coalition on Capitol Hill is pushing legislation that would offer speedy citizenship to paroled Afghans.

The Afghan Adjustment Act, introduced in early August, would expand the special visa for Afghans who helped the U.S. military to also include those who served in the Afghan armed forces. It also would offer a fast track to permanent legal status for Afghans who submit to stiffer vetting, allowing them to bypass years-long backlogs in other immigration categories.

The White House tried to attach a version of the citizenship plan to a bill this year aimed at helping Ukraine fend off Russia’s invasion, but that effort faltered.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 Taliban celebrate year in power
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/31/afghanistan-taliban-anniversary-us-withdrawal/
GIST	<p>KABUL — Bagram air base, once the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan, is where the Taliban’s senior leadership and fighters gathered Wednesday to mark one year since the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from the country.</p> <p>Images released by the Taliban’s media outlet show fighters marching in Western-style uniforms, followed by columns of armored vehicles bearing the group’s black-and-white flag moving down one of the main runways. Helicopters flew above the crowd.</p> <p>“We are gathered here to celebrate the first anniversary of the withdrawal,” Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, told local media attending the ceremony. “I am proud that our country was liberated on this day and American troops were forced to leave Afghanistan,” he said.</p>

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan marked the end of over two decades of war here, but did not lead to a negotiated peace. Afghan government security forces collapsed in the face of Taliban attacks and when the group reached Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani fled, effectively handing over the capital.

Under Taliban rule Afghanistan is more secure for most Afghans, but civil liberties and the [rights of women](#) are severely restricted. Lacking formal international recognition, the country remains politically isolated and a growing economic crisis has plunged millions [deeper into poverty](#).

In a video broadcast by the Taliban's media wing, Mohammad Hassan Akhund, the group's acting prime minister, said the Taliban was left with nothing after the previous government collapsed.

"The foreigners took everything with them when they left, and imposed sanctions on Afghanistan which have resulted in poverty and hunger," he said. But much of the military equipment flaunted at Bagram appeared to be what U.S. and NATO forces left behind in the last days of what became a hasty withdrawal.

Foreign media outlets were banned from the gathering in Bagram by Taliban leadership citing security concerns.

Akhund warned that "pressures" such as sanctions and other economic restrictions "will not give any result," calling instead for greater understanding and engagement with the Taliban.

In central Kabul, hundreds of other Taliban fighters gathered to fly flags and spray glittery foam into the air as they cheered the country's "independence day."

Abdul Hakim Saih brought his five grandchildren to watch the festivities. Originally from Logar province, the family only moved to Kabul after the Taliban takeover when Salih's son — a Taliban fighter — was given a position with the group's intelligence forces.

"In Logar we were always on the run, moving from place to place to escape night raids and bombings," he said, explaining the violence was particularly hard on the children. Under Taliban rule he said his family no longer has to fear for their safety. "It's a better life now."

The complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan began under the Trump administration and the policy decision was [upheld by President Biden](#), who stated that the exit would be conducted "responsibly, deliberately and safely."

But after a set of swift Taliban gains suddenly left the Afghan capital surrounded, diplomats, Afghan officials and aid workers scrambled to flee the country. When the Taliban entered Kabul faster than predicted, [chaos engulfed Kabul airport](#) for weeks as tens of thousands rushed to escape.

Since then, some Afghans who attempted to flee on the U.S. airlift say they now feel secure under the Taliban. Others who fear for their lives because of connections to U.S. and NATO forces or activist groups [remain in hiding](#), hoping over a year on they may still have a chance to get out.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Canada spy trafficked people for IS?
SOURCE	https://en.as.com/latest_news/who-is-shamima-begum-and-why-did-a-canadian-spy-smuggle-her-for-islamic-state-n/?omnil=resrelrecomv
GIST	A longstanding legal case in the United Kingdom had some bombshell news on Wednesday night after it emerged a Canadian spy was involved in the traffic of British children to Syria during its occupation by Islamic State , also know as IS.

The agent, **named Mohammed Al Rasheed**, helped facilitate the journey for those seeking to join the terrorist group. The BBC obtained a dossier on Rasheed that contains all the information on how he carried out the job including private data gathered from his hard drive. Rasheed was arrested in 2015 with information on the girls location.

The allegations were first revealed in a [British Times article](#) analysing a new book by one of its former reporters, Richard Kerbaj. He has a book being published on August 31 named, The Secret History of the Five Eyes, which is an investigation into the intelligence group of the US, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

An hour after the story broke, the [BBC reported](#) that they had seen information that show **the agent in question had shared Begum's passport details with the Canadian secret service**. The agent also claims to have smuggled other Britons to fight for IS.

Serious questions would need to be asked of both the Canadian and British governments for their culpability in ferrying British citizens and in Begum's case children, to an active warzone. The documents, seen by the BBC, show the Britons' details were passed to the Canadian embassy in Jordan. **The Canadian government stayed quiet even after the London police released an urgent appeal for information**. Once they were aware they told the head of British counter-terrorism Richard Walton. Neither group went public with their information.

"The notion of saying nothing and hoping for the scandal to go away worked in Canada's favour with regards to keeping the lid on how an agent for CSIS had smuggled western children and young adult volunteers into Syria while their British allies struggled to contain the flow of aspiring jihadists fleeing the UK to join Isis," says Kerbaj in his book.

Who is Shamima Begum?

While she may be a new name for an American audience, **Shamima Begum is well known in the UK**. She left the UK aged 15 to join IS with two friends and is at the centre of a long court case over whether she has the right to be a British citizen.

After moving to Syria in 2015, **the British Home Office, headed by Sajid Javid, revoked her British citizenship**, arguing she would not be rendered stateless as her family is of Bangladeshi origin. The Bangladeshi government denied she was a citizen, but the British government overruled the appeal and said it was in the [public interest](#) to keep begum out of the UK.

The centre of her defence rests upon her argument that she is the victim of child trafficking. Begum told [the BBC's upcoming I'm Not A Monster podcast](#): "[Rasheen] organized the entire trip from Turkey to Syria... I don't think anyone would have been able to make it to Syria without the help of smugglers.

Tasnime Akunjee, the lawyer for Begum's family, **said it was "shocking" that a Canadian intelligence asset was a key part of the smuggling operation**. "Someone who is supposed to be an ally, protecting our people, rather than trafficking British children into a war zone," he added.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Afghan rebel groups wage war Taliban rule
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/year-after-us-exit-afghan-rebel-groups-are-waging-war-taliban-rule-1737875
GIST	<p>One year since the departure of the final U.S. military plane from Kabul marked the end of a 20-year war effort in Afghanistan, the Taliban's reign over the country remains powerful, but not undisputed.</p> <p>While jihadi groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) present a threat to the Taliban's Islamic Emirate on one front, a number of rebel groups are also locked in combat with rulers of Afghanistan, who are still unrecognized by the international community.</p>

The actual strength of these organizations remains a matter of dispute, especially given their geographical and geopolitical isolation, but their common goal of overthrowing the Islamic Emirate makes them a lingering challenge for the Taliban's project to legitimize and secure their lasting control over Afghanistan.

Newsweek spoke with five such groups, nearly all of whom claimed to be made up mostly of former Afghan National Security Forces personnel now fighting against the Taliban in support of a democratic Afghanistan without any international backing. Each warned that, rather than posing as a force for stability, the Taliban had opened the floodgates to other militant groups including ISIS, [Al-Qaeda](#), the Islamic Union of Uzbekistan, [the East Turkestan Islamic Movement](#), Jamaat Ansurallah (sometimes referred to as the Tajik Taliban), and the Pakistani Taliban.

The most prominent of the anti-Taliban factions is the National Resistance Front. The group is led by Ahmad Massoud, son of famed militia leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, known as "the lion of Panjshir," who fought against the Soviet military in the 1980s. He then battled the Taliban in the 1990s until he was assassinated by Al-Qaeda just days before the 9/11 attack that sparked the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan.

Afghan government forces quickly collapsed in the face of nationwide lightning Taliban advances in the leadup to the U.S. withdrawal last August. But the National Resistance Front held out for months in Massoud's stronghold in the Panjshir Valley before being forced out into the side valleys of northeastern Afghanistan.

Ali Maisam Nazary, head of the National Resistance Front's foreign relations, told *Newsweek* that despite the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan last year, "there are still parts that are free, that are controlled by us at the moment."

He said the group remains active in Panjshir as well as in the Andarab district of neighboring Baghlan province, while its forces are actively fighting in six provinces and operating in a dozen.

"In order for us to fight we need territory," he told *Newsweek*, "we need to have permanent bases, places for our forces to regroup, to re-energize, for us to be able to store our equipment or arms and munitions, so we actually have territory under our control."

He said the group has not yet fully taken any provinces as it remains in "phase one" of its strategy, which consists of trying to "exhaust the enemy, to gather as many resources and to expand as much as possible before moving into phase two, which is liberating districts and provinces and being able to sustain our control."

The National Resistance Front is one of the few anti-Taliban factions to claim actual territory and broadcast relatively significant offensives against the ruling Islamist movement. In fact, Nazary argued that the National Resistance Front is in a class of its own, and therefore deserves international support.

"This has to be an international effort," Nazary said. "We can't be left all alone fighting international terrorism."

"This isn't only our battle; this isn't only our struggle," he added, "and for us, if it's not only our security and stability, global security and stability are at stake. So it has to be an international effort and the last remaining anti-terrorist force, the last remaining democratic forces are our forces, the NRF."

Citing recent high-profile attacks against Taliban forces, including an offensive on August 15 as the Taliban celebrated the anniversary of their taking of Kabul, Nazary asserted that the National Resistance Front has demonstrated itself as a capable force.

"We've shown our competence, we've shown our motivation, our morale," Nazary said. "Now it's time for the international community to act and to help us suppress international terrorism, contain and eradicate

terrorism from Afghanistan before it becomes a greater threat, before we see terrorist attacks originating and emanating from Afghanistan and the region in Europe, North America and elsewhere in the world."

And though Nazary argued that the National Resistance Front was "the only group that is on the ground, that has bases and has a clear leadership today," he also acknowledged that "there might be groups that have announced their existence" more recently.

"We welcome any group, even if they're independent from us, any group that shares our vision for a democratic, free Afghanistan," he said, "where every single citizen enjoys equal rights, regardless of race, religion and gender, any group that's against terrorism and extremism."

"We welcome them," he added, "and we're willing to cooperate."

One such group is the Afghanistan Islamic National & Liberation Movement, or Afghanistan Liberation Movement, whose military commander, Khalid Aziz, told *Newsweek* it was his forces that were "at the forefront of the fight against Taliban, ISIS and Al Qaeda."

He too appealed for international aid in his fight against the Taliban.

"The cooperation of the international community and [NATO](#) against these threats is necessary, important and valuable as they are fighting the war for the peace of whole world," Aziz said.

In the absence of this support, he warned that Afghanistan "seems to have once again become a safe haven for terrorist groups that may become a launching pad for terrorist activities across the world."

There are more groups that are reported to have taken up arms against the Taliban, as many as 25, according to Afghanistan Liberation Movement spokesperson and former security adviser Nasser Waziri.

Waziri said the National Resistance Front was the most dominant force in the north, while the Afghanistan Liberation Movement is "mainly" present in the south, where he said the Taliban was most vulnerable.

"ALM has checkpoints in 28 provinces," Waziri told *Newsweek*, "and we are fighting for education for both girls and boys, women's rights, liberating Afghanistan from rules such as requiring women to wear burqas, and giving women their jobs back in the public sector."

When it came to interactions between the Afghanistan Liberation Movement and other rebel groups, Waziri explained that various anti-Taliban factions "have different agendas, but we continue to talk to each other, especially when it comes to fighting proxies."

And though he said some groups include "members who were corrupt officials in the former Afghan government," he said such individuals were banned from joining the Afghanistan Liberation Movement. He said his faction sought to diversify its ranks because "in order to fight corruption, we need new faces, more women delegates," and "we have a lot of educated young Afghans who are waiting for a chance."

"Every group is fighting the Taliban in a different way," Waziri said. "But mostly the women's resistance is more effective against the Taliban. I call them the real heroes of Afghanistan."

He specifically acknowledged the activities of two other groups, the Afghanistan Freedom Front and the Andarab Resistance Front. He said they share "the same supply chain" as the National Resistance Front, with whom he said the pair has ties.

A spokesperson for the Afghanistan Freedom Front said the group was currently operating in a wide range of areas: Salang valley in Parwan province; the Andarab and Khost-Farang districts in Baghlan province; the Ishkamish district in Takhar province as well as Sar-e-Pol, Nuristan and Faryab provinces.

Rather than holding ground, the Afghanistan Freedom Front's bases "are mobile," according to the spokesperson.

"This means that the AFF forces are not supposed to hold a specific area as a main base while the whole valleys or hard mountain passes are used as bases and ambushes by our forces," the spokesperson told *Newsweek*. "Nonetheless, the AFF is not seeking to gain territorial control because of the overall military situation that doesn't necessarily accommodate such a tactic. Our main military approach is to cause damage to the enemy without endangering our own troops and the civilian population."

Two tactics employed to this end are "open operations" in the parts of the country in which the group is active, as well as "operations in the urban areas such as Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and other capital cities," the spokesperson said.

Discussing the group's goals, the spokesperson said the Afghanistan Freedom Front "is fighting to achieve a democratic society free from any kind totalitarian and backwardness, which the Taliban are imposing on our people."

"We want a new constitutional order, which can embrace democratic aspirations of our people which are the equality of every man and woman before the law and no discrimination of any kind such as race, language, belief, sex, color and within our society," the spokesperson said. "We want our people to enjoy a free electoral system to elect their servicemen and women to public offices."

"Therefore, we extend our cooperation to any forces, including the NRF, which are fighting for freedom and democracy and aligning our activities to that path," the spokesperson added.

As for the Andarab Resistance Front, a spokesperson for that group discussed its "struggle for the complete freedom of our country, people, social justice and the destruction of the terrorists who have killed our people in the most brutal way possible in the last two decades."

"We are fighting for the establishment of a people's government based on democratic methods and transparent elections," the spokesperson told *Newsweek*, "for a government where women can live and study freely, and our people can play a role in their destiny and determining the government and the law."

The spokesperson also touted "a close and strong relationship with the National Resistance Front."

"We are in sync with them on international issues and basic structures," the spokesperson added.

In terms of territory, the spokesperson said that "the Andarab Resistance Front is present in different parts of Andarab, we have more than ten villages in Pol-e-Hesar district and several villages in Banu and Deh-Salah districts, from where our operations and battles against the Taliban take place."

"The main areas of our activities are in Andarab districts and the border areas with Panjshir and Khost (Hindukush)," the spokesperson added. "The majority of our activities are defensive, but offensive guerilla operations and heavy ambushes are carried out by our resistance fighters in the mentioned areas, and we have inflicted numerous and heavy casualties on the enemy."

A fifth group, the Watandost Front, has also taken on the Taliban. The organization's spokesperson, Zahra Sadat, told *Newsweek* its forces "are active in big cities like Kabul, Kapisa, Ningarhar, Laghman, Ghazni, Maidan Wardak, Zabul, Paktika, Paktia, Kandahar, Helmand, Logar, Herat and Urozgan."

She said Watandost Front holds that all Afghans are equal, and that its ranks included "lots of Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek" — the three largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan behind Pashtuns. She asserted the group was actively striving to increase its representation from every Afghan ethnic community.

Echoing comments provided earlier this month to Jamestown Foundation analyst Daniele Garafolo, Sadat said Watandost Front doesn't "have any relation with Mr. Massoud" of the National Resistance Front.

"But I respect him, and I can say his father is one of Afghanistan's biggest heroes, and all of us respect Ahmad Shah Massoud," she said, adding that his son, Ahmad Massoud, "is also an anti-Talib figure like us, and due to this sometimes we help their forces north of Kabul city."

Sadat said the tenets of Watandost Front "follow the Islamic law," and that "everyone deserves human rights," including women, who "are half the population" of Afghanistan. She held out hope for making the group's vision a reality, saying, "Inshallah, one day we will defeat the Taliban, and after that everything must be run by election."

The multitude of other groups that have claimed anti-Taliban actions range from ideological outfits such as communist formations to ethnic militias, including those aligned with the Hazaras, a largely Shiite Muslim community that has suffered some of the worst atrocities both before and after the Taliban takeover.

Kamran Mir Hazar, a Norway-based human rights activist from Afghanistan's Hazaristan region and founder and editor-in-chief of Kabul Press, said much of the Hazara resistance overlapped with that being mounted by the National Resistance Front, whose leadership is known to include a number of Tajiks, including former Vice President Amrullah Saleh, as well as Massoud himself.

Hazar noted, however, that the Hazara fighters "are not necessarily under the command of Massoud," even if "they do support each other, when possible."

The Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun and Sunni Muslim movement, has repeatedly rejected accusations that it has singled out other religious-based communities in Afghanistan. Officials have also downplayed the presence of other militant groups, claiming it was the U.S. military presence that allowed organizations such as ISIS to thrive.

"With the arrival of the Islamic Emirate, all these problems ended and complete security was ensured in the entire country," Alhanafi Wardak, a prominent Taliban member, told *Newsweek*. "This is the biggest achievement in terms of security."

And while ISIS has claimed a number of significant attacks against both civilians and Taliban forces, Hanafi said that "the detection and security forces of the Islamic Emirate managed to thwart the most sophisticated attacks of ISIS in the capital city of Kabul, conducted successful operations and discovered and destroyed their most important hideouts."

"Now, day by day, our intelligence and security forces are becoming organized and strong," he said. "ISIS has been severely beaten and defeated, and ISIS can no longer pose any threat."

"The world should be sure that the territory of Afghanistan will not be used against any country," he added.

Hanafi said of the National Resistance Front that "this is an empty name. Their propaganda and claims are only limited to the media." He said that a trip to Panjshir and other northern provinces would show that "no one will recognize" the National Resistance Front, "and if they have heard this name, the answer will be empty laughter."

He also blamed the U.S. and others involved in the protracted foreign intervention for still bearing "the thought and ideology of creating problems and war" and exaggerating ISIS presence to justify sanctions and military action at a time when the Taliban was conducting semi-regular diplomacy with regional countries such as China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan.

"The international community should no longer support America's orders and negative views regarding Afghanistan," Hanafi said. "On the basis of its responsibility, the international community should choose the way of interaction and understanding for the improvement of the human condition, the development of relations and negotiations."

Washington has continued to issue warnings about the Taliban's human rights record and potential links to outlawed organizations such as Al-Qaeda, especially after President [Joe Biden](#) announced the killing of the militant group's chief, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a drone strike in Kabul late last month.

A spokesperson for the State Department told *Newsweek* that U.S. officials "remain committed to further degrading al-Qa'ida, ISIS-Khorasan, and other terrorist groups that pose a threat to the United States and our partners and allies," adding that "it is also in the Taliban's interest to continue their efforts to eliminate terrorist groups."

But the Biden administration continues to discourage open rebellion against the Taliban.

"We call on all sides to exercise restraint and to engage," the spokesperson said. "This is the only way that Afghanistan can confront its many challenges. We want to see the emergence of stable and sustainable political dispensation via peaceful means."

Though peace continues to elude Afghanistan on the first anniversary of the U.S. exit, bloodshed has yet to return to wartime levels.

Sam Jones, head of communications for the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), pointed out that "the overall level of violence has decreased significantly since the American withdrawal." At the same time, he noted that "violence targeting civilians, specifically, is back on the rise after an initial drop in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August 2021."

Jones told *Newsweek* that around 59% of these attacks have been blamed on the Taliban, though "due to reporting challenges the attacker is often unidentified." He argued that the most common targets were members of the former Afghan security forces, followed by women and journalists as well as those who appear to have been singled out due to their ethnic and religious affiliations.

The Taliban's rivals have also made waves in terms of violent activity.

"In addition to the shift toward violent repression targeting civilians, trends since the fall of Kabul have also been marked by rising levels of fighting between the Taliban and anti-Taliban resistance groups like the National Resistance Front (NRF), as well as elevated Islamic State activity," Jones said.

He highlighted data showing that the National Resistance Front "has ramped up attacks on Taliban forces in 2022," with up to 300 clashes reported in the first six months of this year. Most of these engagements have taken place in northeastern Baghlan and Panjshir provinces. A particular spike in confrontations has emerged in recent months, coinciding with the "spring offensive" — a hallmark of the traditional Taliban strategy now being launched by its foes.

Jones also stated that "at least nine other armed anti-Taliban resistance groups have emerged in 2022, engaging in over 100 armed clashes with Taliban forces during the first half of the year," the most active of which appeared to be the Afghanistan Freedom Front, "which has reportedly engaged in at least 59 clashes with the Taliban since its formation in March."

ISIS attacks against the Taliban have also increased after an initial lull earlier this year, spiking in June, according to Jones. And as ISIS targeted civilians too, he said that about half of the 20 attacks attributed to the jihadis this year were aimed at Hazaras and Shiite Muslims.

Yet another risk the Taliban faces is from within. Jones said "infighting has also escalated in 2022, with nearly 60 incidents reported in the first half of the year," constituting "a rate nearly quadruple that of the period between the Taliban takeover last August and the end of 2021."

On the sidelines of these inter-Afghan battles, clashes involving neighboring nations have also increased, including reported Pakistani strikes on Afghan territory and exchanges of fire across the Afghan-Iranian

	<p>border. Jones said that "over 40 cross-border incidents were reported during the first six months of 2022, including cases where neighboring state forces engaged in clashes with the Taliban, perpetrated direct attacks against Afghan civilians, or fired artillery or launched airstrikes into Afghan territory."</p> <p>"In short, despite the total decline in conflict events since the fall of Kabul," Jones said, "violence has continued to evolve significantly in Afghanistan, and civilians are bearing the brunt of persistent, and in some cases escalating, insecurity."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Pandemic impact extremists use of IEDs
SOURCE	https://reliefweb.int/report/world/impact-covid-19-pandemic-extremist-groups-use-ieds
GIST	<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, there has been speculation about the impact the pandemic could have on the trajectories of extremist violence. The EU's counter-terrorism coordinator warned that terrorists and violent extremists exploit major crises to achieve their objectives, and extremist groups adjusted quickly to the online communication platforms used extensively in lockdowns, both in personal and professional capacities. Pro-ISIS groups adapted their efforts to disseminate propaganda material specifically in the English language, and al-Qaeda tried to encourage conversions to Islam using online platforms targeting specifically the 'Western World.'</p> <p>However, broader research into the activities of extremist groups suggests this increased online activity has yet to translate into increased violence. Miles Comerford, from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, noted that despite the fears of extremist groups seeking to exploit the crisis to achieve their objectives, there was a notable reduction in terrorist activities in contexts where terrorism is predominantly an urban phenomenon. Additionally, in settings where terrorism operates within the context of a broader conflict, the pandemic seems to have had relatively little effect on the trajectory of violence. James Wither and Richard Masek, of the George Marshall European Centre for Strategic Studies, also noted that, outside of areas already impacted by armed conflict, there seems not to have been a rise in terrorist attacks during the pandemic.</p> <p>Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have been the cause of at least 50% of civilian casualties of explosive weapon use in the last 11 years, according to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)'s review of English language media sources. The most prolific users of IEDs in that time have been extremist groups, in particular ISIS, the Taliban, and Al Shabaab. In line with the findings of Comerford (2020) and Wither and Masek (2020), based on IED data collected over the last decade, AOAV finds that incidents of IED attacks decreased globally by 12% from 2019 to 2020.</p> <p>For this report, AOAV has analysed levels of IED violence globally from 2011 to 2021, mapping out the way in which patterns of violence from 2020 – the year the WHO declared a global pandemic – differ from overall patterns over the last decade, in order to discern the potential impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on extremist groups' use of IEDs.</p> <p>AOAV has been collecting data on the impacts of explosive weapons, as reported in English-language news sources, since 2010, using a methodology adapted from an incident-based methodology as used by Landmine Action and Medact in 2009. Our data on explosive violence incidents is gathered from English-language media reports on the following factors: the date, time, and location of the incident; the number and circumstances of people killed and injured; the weapon type; the reported user and target; the detonation method and whether displacement or damage to the location was reported. AOAV does not claim to have captured every explosive incident, but the data is comprehensive enough to reveal patterns of harm over time. For the purposes of this report, AOAV is focused on capturing incidents of harm caused by the intentional use of IEDs by extremist groups. The data analysed here, therefore, does not include accidental detonations, explosive weapons that failed to explode as intended and remain in the form of unexploded ordnance (UXOs), or poorly secured or stockpiled explosive weapons that cause unintended harm to civilians.</p>

Based on IED data collected over the last decade, AOAV finds that, globally, incidents of IED attacks decreased by 12% from 2019 to 2020, while populated areas remained a consistent target of IED attacks and accounted for the majority of civilian casualties. Non-specific IEDs remained the most frequently used IEDs across the span of years from 2011 to 2021, and consistently resulted in the majority of civilian casualties – non-specific IEDs caused 48% of civilian casualties of IEDs from 2011 to 2021, and 51% of casualties between 2020 and 2021. Urban residential areas saw the majority, 16%, of civilian casualties of IEDs during the pandemic, compared to markets, 14%, over the past decade.

Islamic State (IS), the Taliban, and Al Shabaab remained the most prolific perpetrators of IED attacks from 2011 to 2021, although Islamic State affiliates in Afghanistan caused more civilian casualties than their counterparts in Syria and Iraq during the pandemic. Additionally, the discursive and active responses of each group to the pandemic differed significantly, illustrating the pluralistic nature of extremist groups. This, along with the diverging patterns of IED violence discernable in different countries, highlights the distinctive ways IEDs are deployed in different contexts: Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan remained the countries most affected by IED violence over the past decade, with distinctive patterns of violence demonstrating the individuality of the IED phenomenon.

As with most data relating to the COVID 19 pandemic, the causal relationship of the pandemic to the pattern of IED attacks is fragile, with limited generalisability. However, the results of AOAV's analysis reveal distinctive changes in the way IEDs have been used since 2020, and suggest avenues for further research regarding the correlation between lockdowns, the social fabric of armed groups, and access to materials.

REPORTING DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

AOAV's methodology is subject to a number of limitations and biases, many relating to the nature of the source material. Data and emerging trends and patterns are contingent on different levels of reporting across regions and countries, and under-reporting is likely in some contexts. In addition, only English-language media reports are used, which does not provide a comprehensive picture of explosive weapon use around the world.

Furthermore, it is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the reporting patterns on which AOAV is dependent. Reported incidents of explosive weapon use decreased from 2019 to 2021 for other weapon types as well, notably air-launched and ground-launched weapons, while reported incidents involving mines increased in that time, and incidents involving multiple or unclear weapon types remained consistent (fig. 1). The extent to which these patterns are due to reporting dynamics or the impact of COVID 19 lockdowns on explosive violence more generally is a question which raises pertinent avenues for further research: what was the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on explosive violence perpetrated by state and non-state actors? What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person and remote reporting? What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the spread of and access to information?

[Return to Top](#)

Click on source link to download PDF report: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on extremist groups' use of IEDs

HEADLINE	08/30 Inside shadow evacuation of Kabul
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/inside-shadow-evacuation-kabul-afghanistan/
GIST	<p>AT 11:12 PM on August 15, 2021, Worth Parker's phone pinged with a message. <i>Sir. I hope you are well, it began. By any chance do you know any Marines who are on the ground right now?</i></p> <p>Parker did not. He was in his bed in Wilmington, North Carolina, 7,200 miles from "the ground" of Kabul, having retired from the United States Marines six weeks earlier. He was trying to stay as disconnected as possible, even shutting off notifications to all of his apps. But, as a self-described "49-year-old Luddite," he'd accidentally left Facebook turned on. The message continued:</p> <p><i>My brother, who was an interpreter with the Special Mission Wing, and my father, who used to be the fixed wing aircraft squadron commander until he retired and then he worked for an American defense</i></p>

contracting company as an advisor, are stuck in Kabul. Of course, my and my brother's enlistment in the US [military](#) make them even bigger targets. I tried all the official channels but no one is responding.

The note was from Jason Essazay. A native of Mazar-i-Sharif, Essazay had watched US troops arrive in Afghanistan in 2001 when he was 12, and he had spent the first eight years of his adulthood working with them as an interpreter and fixer. Alongside American special operators, he had engaged the Taliban in dozens of gunfights and survived three IED attacks, the last of which hospitalized him for a month. In 2014, after two years on the waiting list, he acquired a Special Immigrant Visa. He left his family behind, settled in Houston, and for 18 months worked at a gas station, then a Walmart, then a steel plant, before joining the [Marine Reserves](#).

Essazay and Parker had been in touch only briefly, a year earlier, when Parker edited a blog post Essazay wrote for the tactical fitness brand Soflete, about how [yoga and jiu-jitsu helped him cope](#) with PTSD and the culture shock of living in America. (Disclosure: I first met Parker in 2018 while editing for Soflete.) Now Parker was Essazay's last resort as he attempted to rescue his family from the Taliban, which had taken Kabul hours earlier.

Parker was sure there was little he could do. After 27 years of service, he had spent the first 45 days of his retirement trying to wash the Marines, and Afghanistan, out of his system. He had just returned from a monthlong cross-country RV trip with his 10-year-old daughter, after missing her birth and many birthdays. He was neglecting his regular fitness routine and letting his gray beard grow out. More than anything, he was trying to shed the title Lieutenant Colonel and become simply Worth.

Parker apologized, promised he'd do what he could, wished Essazay luck, and said to keep him updated. Then he fell asleep.

IN APRIL 2021, President [Joe Biden announced](#) that he would honor the deal struck during the Trump administration and complete the full withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan by September 11. The [20-year war](#), America's longest, cost the lives of 2,325 US soldiers and over \$2 trillion, stretching across four presidential administrations. In all, more than 176,000 people were killed, including nearly 50,000 Afghan civilians.

At the time of Biden's announcement, some 2,500 US troops remained in Afghanistan, and several thousand American civilians and contractors lived and worked in the country. Meanwhile, about 81,000 Afghans who had worked with the US military during the war had pending applications for [Special Immigrant Visas](#).

By early summer, Biden had set the official evacuation deadline for August 31. The Taliban inched closer to Kabul, capturing surrounding cities, regions, and entire provinces with relative ease. On August 10, a US intelligence report estimated the Taliban would [take the capital within one to three months](#). Five days later, Kabul fell.

The city's airport, Hamid Karzai International, immediately became one of the only escape routes out of the country. Within hours, thousands of people flooded its gates. Most were turned away, lacking the necessary papers. Many were tear-gassed. And several died after being crushed in a human stampede. Footage of two Afghans [clinging to a departing US Air Force C-17 cargo plane](#) and then falling to their deaths quickly spread across the globe. They were later identified as a 24-year-old dentist and a 17-year-old player on [Afghanistan's national youth soccer team](#) and became symbols of the most chaotic evacuation since the fall of Saigon.

THE NIGHT AFTER Kabul fell, Parker was reading about the unfolding bedlam when he saw mention of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, which was flying 160 of its troops from Kuwait to Kabul to assist with the evacuation. The unit happened to be commanded by Parker's old friend Colonel Eric Cloutier. Suddenly, Parker had boots on the ground. He sent Essazay another Facebook message, telling him to send the names of his family members and any location data he had. About an hour later, Essazay responded

with the names of his two brothers and his parents and their address in downtown Kabul, and Parker forwarded the info to a subordinate of Cloutier's. He warned Essazay not to get his hopes up.

A day passed. On August 17, two weeks before the evacuation deadline, Parker drove west across North Carolina to a friend's cabin in the Appalachian Mountains, where he planned to spend a few days hiking, scouting deer, and fly-fishing. By the time he reached the mountains, Tropical Storm Fred had descended. The rain was so heavy Parker could barely see through the windshield of his black [Tacoma](#). When he arrived at the cabin, the power had been knocked out. He was disconnected from the outside world.

Around 10:30 that night, he was sitting on the front porch when the power flickered back on and his phone began to ping with Facebook notifications. His Marine contact in Kabul had been telling him where to send the Essazays. One of the final messages ordered urgent action: *Get your people's family to the airport now.*

The message instructed them to head to the airport's East Gate, make sure that no one else was with them, and give a password to marines manning the gate. The family would first have to get through a Taliban checkpoint, the message warned. *This could go to shit. But they have a chance. Get them here in an hour.* The message was 90 minutes old.

Certain it was too late, Parker called Essazay, who told his family to leave everything behind, not even packing a change of clothes, which might reveal that they were trying to flee. Knowing the Taliban wouldn't search women, the family duct-taped some \$13,000 in cash to Essazay's mother's body, hidden beneath her dress. Essazay instructed them to wipe their phones, including the messages with his instructions. Anything linking them to American forces could get them killed. "But if you stay home," Essazay told his parents, "you're going to die."

Over the next few hours, as the family headed along seven congested miles toward the airport, Essazay and Parker shared Facebook messages. Essazay worked from a Middle Eastern café in Houston that stayed open until 4 am, drinking black tea as he relayed his family's movements. Other regulars occasionally stopped their chess and card games to crowd behind his laptop. Parker, sitting on his friend's couch in Appalachia, kept his marine contact in Kabul abreast.

The family arrived at the Taliban checkpoint and told the guards they were taking their elderly matriarch to the hospital. They were allowed to pass. By 1 am US Eastern time, two and a half hours after the original window had closed, they arrived at the gate. Essazay's brother Omar pushed through the crowd to reach the marines manning the gate, insisting that his family was supposed to get through and telling the guards that his brother was a US Marine. When they tried to turn him away, he supplied the name of Parker's contact inside the airport, and the password he'd been given.

Waiting for a response, Parker recognized a long-dormant feeling. It was the closest he'd come to the exhilaration and exhaustion of combat since the years he had spent in the real thing. As the rain continued to pound the mountainside cabin, Essazay sent Parker one final message.

They are in. Semper Fi, sir.

19 Days Left

On August 12, three days before Essazay contacted Parker, Joe Saboe had just returned from a family snorkeling vacation in Hawaii. He was coaching soccer practice in Denver when his cell phone rang. It was his brother Dan in Phoenix, asking if he could help a friend and his family escape Afghanistan.

Dan explained that Abasin Hidai, a mutual friend of his and his wife, had returned to Afghanistan to help rebuild his country. Now he and his family were trapped. Worse, Hidai had worked as a water engineer with the US Army, and his brother had served on Afghanistan's National Security Council. If they didn't leave, they feared, the Taliban would soon kill them. Hidai, who had started the visa process years earlier, had no luck reaching the American embassy. He was desperately calling, texting, and emailing every person he knew with any connection to the US military.

Saboe, then 36, had been out of the [Army](#) a full seven years. He describes his tenure as a soldier as thoroughly workaday: ROTC at Georgetown; then a 2009 deployment in [Iraq](#) as an infantry officer, where for one year he helped build schools and hunt proto-ISIS insurgents; and finally teaching ROTC students back home before getting out in 2014. He got his master's in education at Stanford and moved to Denver, where he was running a workforce education startup, coaching elite youth soccer, and raising two daughters with his wife.

Listening to his younger brother, Saboe was reminded of the end of his rotation in Mosul, where he was among the last troops to leave the city before it fell to [ISIS](#). He thought of the Iraqi friends he'd made, many of whom had to flee the country. He feared the Taliban's takeover of Kabul would be even more swift and brutal, and that all the work some 800,000 American soldiers had done in the country over the past 20 years might have been in vain. But he figured there was nothing he could do. He'd never even been to Afghanistan.

Still, that evening Saboe tried the closest thing to a Noncombatant Evacuation Operations tool he had: Facebook. He posted a note to his 1,400 friends that began, "Hey State Department, DOD, or politico friends—need your help urgently." Without naming him, he explained Hidai's predicament and asked anyone who might have "helpful information or a firm, strong lead" to respond.

By the following morning, Friday, Saboe's post had received 32 sad-face and hugging-heart emoji, but also one direct message from an ROTC buddy he hadn't talked to in nearly 20 years.

Call me, the message said. I am trying to get one out too.

The friend, who was still in the Army, working at the Pentagon, laid out a plan. He told Saboe to write a letter saying that Hidai and his family would come live with Saboe and his family in Denver, have it notarized, and send it to the American embassy in Kabul. After a quick discussion with his wife, Saboe wrote the letter. He walked two doors down, where his neighbor, a lawyer, notarized it, and then he sent it to the embassy via the fax number on the agency's website. He also called someone at the embassy he had reached through a shared Georgetown connection. The person assured Saboe that Hidai would be receiving a call within the hour. A return fax never came, and the embassy never called. When Kabul fell on Sunday, US staff at the embassy shredded documents, lowered the American flag, and were airlifted out of the country.

Later on Friday, however, Saboe received another Facebook message, this time from a marine who was at the airport. The marine said the Hidais should head to the North Gate as soon as possible. Saboe relayed the information to Hidai, but as the family hid all their documents beneath Hidai's wife's clothes and prepared to rush from their home, Saboe got a message telling him to abort. Word had quickly spread that the gate was open, and now hardly anyone was making it through the crowd. Saboe had no choice but to tell the Hidais to sit tight and hope another opportunity to leave might come before the deadline dropped or the Taliban found them.

17 Days Left

Meanwhile, Saboe started hearing from several veterans across the country who'd seen his Facebook post. They were all in their thirties, each trying to get a single contact to safety. By Saturday, August 14, the day before Kabul fell, Saboe decided to link all nine of them in a WhatsApp group, where they could share what they were hearing and relay it back to the people they were trying to help. They posted furtively snapped pictures of the ever-changing and growing number of Taliban checkpoints, sent to them by families and military contacts scattered around the city. Soon, they had a relatively reliable picture of what was happening in real time. Several members of the group had gone into tech after the military, and they started building a detailed map using annotated images from Google Maps and Google Earth, updating it nearly hourly to reflect the movements of the Taliban and the airport's access points. To mitigate confusion between similar or identical last names, they also assigned each potential evacuee or family of evacuees a "chalk number"—a term dating to World War II, when Allied paratroopers had their flight numbers placed on their backs in chalk. The Hidais were Chalk-0001.

As the operation formed, Saboe began working late into the night from his home office, directly below his 11-year-old daughter's bedroom. Around 2 am Denver time on August 16, midday in Kabul, Saboe's phone pinged with a message: Chalk-0028—a family of four—had successfully made it through the North Gate. He immediately texted another family, Chalk-0021, to head there. Minutes later, his phone rang—the family was calling on FaceTime. All nine of them, including four children under 10, were pinned down in a ditch no deeper than 18 inches, barely a dozen yards from the gate, bullets cracking over their heads. The Taliban were killing anyone that moved.

While the horror unfolded on Saboe's phone, his wife, Nichole, sat huddled in the corner, listening to the children's screams, the muzzle blasts, and a woman asking Saboe if he was trying to get them killed. Amid the shouting, he gathered a few details about their location, quickly cross-checked it on Google Earth, and determined that the Taliban were firing from a factory across the road. He told them to stay in the ditch and lie flat, face down. The call went on for nearly 90 minutes, Saboe doing his best to keep them safe while bracing himself to witness their deaths via FaceTime. Eventually, the bullets stopped. The Taliban seemed to have moved on. Surrounded by dead bodies, the family made their way home. Hours later, as his pounding heart finally settled, Saboe lay in bed wondering if he was doing the right thing.

The following day, the family approached another gate, only to return home again after being caught in a stampede that left the mother with a dislocated shoulder and two of the children and their grandmother with broken bones. Finally, on August 18, a friend in St. Louis named Zac Martin, who had served with Saboe in Iraq, returned from his day job in electric utility sales and secured the family a van that would be driven by a Special Forces operator. The van boarded a few miles from the airport and drove the family straight through Abbey Gate, where Chalk-0021 eventually boarded a cargo plane. They've since settled in Virginia. Meanwhile, Chalk-0001, the Hidaïs, remained trapped.

The number of potential evacuees was also ballooning. Saboe had received a call from Jim Webb, a reporter for *The Military Times* who was writing a story about the efforts of Saboe's growing team. When asked what his group was called, Saboe fumbled for a moment, before blurting out "Team America." Webb asked if there was an email to which people could send requests for help and tips, so Dan Saboe created a Gmail account on the fly. [The story was published the following morning](#), August 17. At the time, Saboe's group had 128 people on its list of potential evacuees. Within a day, teamamericaafghan-evac@gmail.com had received over a thousand emails from Americans looking to volunteer and Afghans looking for help escaping. Saboe decided to take the next two weeks off work.

13 Days Left

On the morning of August 18, once his family had cleared Afghanistan airspace on their way to Qatar, Jason Essazay publicly thanked Worth Parker for helping them escape, tagging Parker in a Facebook post he shared with his 1,200 friends. Parker's Facebook messages quickly began to fill with urgent requests for help from Afghans in and around Kabul. He was overwhelmed and, as most of them lacked the proper paperwork to board a flight, largely unable to help.

Later that day, while heading home from the mountains, Parker started receiving voicemails from other Afghan interpreters and fixers, asking if he knew anyone who could help. His phone number had leaked. Driving down I-40, memories of the months he had spent living alongside Afghans walloped him: watching hours of mindless TV with them after a long night supporting combat operations; his first deployment to Bagram Air Field when his daughter was born and the locals showered him with gifts to bring home to her, including a colorful velvet dress covered in tiny bits of mirrored glass.

Parker began calling people across his large network of high-ranking military officials to see if there was anything that could be done to get more people out. By early evening, he was back home and on a Zoom call with Army Lieutenant Colonel Doug Livermore, the national director of external communications for the Special Forces Association; Fred "Doom" Dummer, a retired Special Forces colonel; Anil D'Souza, a former Marine officer; and Mick Mulroy, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense and retired CIA paramilitary officer. They too had been getting dozens of panicked requests from Afghans.

The group began to map out their connections, and within a couple of days they'd grown to nearly 30 members. Mostly retired and over 50, they named themselves the Graybeards. Soon the bulk of Parker's days were spent trying to proselytize their work on Facebook and to the press before getting on the group's nightly [Zoom](#) call. By 10 pm US Eastern time, Afghanistan, nine and a half hours ahead, would begin to light up. Parker and his teammates would work until 3 or 4 am trying to get Afghans through the airport gates, mediating between them and US personnel on the ground as Parker had done with the Essazays. Not 50 days into his long-awaited retirement, Parker apologized to his wife, Katy, and their daughter for deploying yet again, this time to the back of their home in Wilmington.

No one seems to remember who said it first, but someone suggested their nascent operation resembled a digital version of the Allied evacuation from the beaches of northern France in World War II. They christened themselves Task Force Dunkirk. Yet despite their collected résumés and hundreds of combined years running high-level combat and intelligence ops, they were unable to help on the ground in Kabul as much as they would have liked. Their connections were, in a way, too high up.

11 Days Left

On August 20, in a rare moment of downtime, Parker read Jim Webb's *Military Times* story, which Webb had emailed him a few days earlier. He replied to Webb, asking for Saboe's number. In Lieutenant Colonel Parker's mind, he was going to call Saboe, the young millennial captain, flash his résumé, mention Doom Dummar and Mick Mulroy and all of Task Force Dunkirk's sterling bona fides, and enlist Team America to support Dunkirk. On the other end of the call, Saboe remained guarded. Since Team America's Gmail account had gone public, amid thousands of authentic cries for help they'd received dozens of scams. A socialite from Tampa falsely claimed to be an American ambassador. One person called himself The Russian Mercenary and claimed he could travel to Kabul and evacuate Afghans on Team America's behalf, for a fee. Even members of the Taliban were reaching out.

But almost immediately, Parker realized Team America's group was comically more tech savvy than the Graybeards. Saboe showed Parker the infrastructure Team America had built on [Slack](#), with channels like #legal-resources-questions, where volunteers could quickly triage inquiries about immigration law and visa issues, and #resettlement, where they could discuss how to assist Afghans who had made their way to the US. He showed him the [WhatsApp](#) groups designated for each family and the growing database of Afghans that the team had put in a [Google](#) Sheet to organize the entire operation. Rows and columns were color-coded corresponding to a family's documentation status. With one look, a Team America volunteer could determine whether a group was "gate-ready" or whether they'd be turned away.

Parker decided it was time to reject the chain of command that had been drilled into him from the minute he joined the Marines. By the end of the call, he had pledged Task Force Dunkirk's services in direct support of Team America. Saboe realized he suddenly had some of the best-connected people in the US military and intelligence worlds at his disposal.

8 Days Left

Still, the Taliban were adding checkpoints to clog nearly every artery to the airport, and the crowds at every gate were unrelenting. Team America kept getting calls from Afghans who'd spent days making their way toward an escape, running out of food and water along the way, only to get tear-gassed or trampled yards from the gate. Task Force Dunkirk kept getting calls from commanders of the 18- and 19-year-old marines guarding the gates, saying they had no idea who they were supposed to pull from the sea of people.

Boiling with frustration one afternoon, Saboe left his desk and sat in the closet. When he looked up, he noticed the coat hangers dangling above him and remembered something he'd learned as a freshman ROTC cadet, a safety measure dating back to at least the Revolutionary War—simple code words, objects, or devices that silently indicate who's on the same team in a hostile environment. The military calls them "near recognition signals." He ran the idea by Mick Mulroy, the former CIA paramilitary officer, who said that coat hangers wouldn't be readily visible among the masses. Besides, flailing a wire hanger in front of a bunch of marines with M27 rifles wouldn't likely produce the desired result. The signal also needed to

be distinct and impossible for anyone to copy on the spot. Seven days before the evacuation deadline, they started with red scarves.

Abasin Hidai and his family were among the first to use the near recognition signal. Early on the afternoon of August 24, Team America texted Hidai to bring his family and a red scarf to meet a Special Forces operator at a location across the city. But by the time they'd arrived, so had the Taliban, which opened fire on their group, forcing them to run back home. Later that night, Team America arranged another meeting point, less than a mile from the North Gate, where another operator would be waiting for Hidai to wave his scarf. At 8:29 pm Denver time, Hidai texted the Chalk-0001 WhatsApp group. *I have met Abu*, he wrote, using the operator's nom de guerre. *We are together*.

Team America now sent Hidai a second signal to flash to marines as the operator escorted the family to the gate—a text image with the word KING PIN. Then the group chat went silent. The gate was often a communications dead zone—the military had started jamming devices to prevent remote-controlled IED blasts. As the silence continued, a sleepless Saboe pressed for an update.

12:54 am: *Hi Abasin—are you all okay?*

1:42 am: *Hi Abasin— did you all make it through the checkpoint?*

2:53 am: *Hi Abasin, are you in?*

At 4:13 am, Saboe's phone pinged with a message. *Hello everyone. A bundle of thanks. I got in with the group. Love u all.*

To stay a step ahead of the Taliban, Team America changed the near recognition signal almost daily. Six days before the deadline, it was pomegranates. Five, the Minnesota Vikings' logo, loaded onto the evacuees' phones. Four, another text image, the letters "PJ" written in fluorescent green. While Team America set and shared the signal to the evacuees in their Slack and WhatsApp groups, Task Force Dunkirk shared it with the soldiers on the ground. Consulting their crowdsourced map, Team America would then determine a specific location to send evacuees, often in the middle of the night, frequently in a sewage canal not far from the airport. Special Forces soldiers would meet them there, confirm the signal, cross-check their identifying documents against the information Team America had provided, and lead them through a gate as covertly as possible.

Then another Team America volunteer had an idea for further protection: Give each Afghan a digital fingerprint. Travis Boudreau, who served with Saboe in Iraq and is now a logistics executive at a Big Tech company, realized that assigning each of the thousands of potential evacuees a unique QR code would immediately remove human error from the equation. Team America began scheduling buses to be loaded miles from the airport, outside the Taliban's purview. Each passenger had to present a QR code, which was printed discreetly within larger images of various objects and animals, invisible to the human eye. Then the bus would safely drive them through the gates.

The Final Week

What had started a few days earlier with Saboe taking a phone call from his brother on a soccer field now bordered on an organized military operation. But the number of Afghans pleading for help was growing exponentially, and the group was hugely overstretched. A \$2 trillion, generation-long war was ending with Saboe posting free classifieds to Facebook and LinkedIn, asking for help, no military experience required. Volunteers had to personally know someone in the group, and—because phishing scams from Russia, China, and possibly the Taliban kept flooding the inbox—no foreign nationals were allowed. Team America soon swelled from 30 to more than 200 volunteers, nearly two-thirds of whom had never served in the military. They were Saboe's neighbors, former classmates and coworkers, parents of the kids he coached soccer for, his wife, his dad, even his 12th-grade English teacher.

New members spent their first day learning to be case managers for individual families. While veterans were given the option to become Battle Captains, who managed the movements of Afghans in Kabul, civilians were tasked with managing the growing inbox, which in the final days was flooding with thousands of emails every hour. Trainees learned the rules for fielding emails: Only take in information; don't click on anything. They were warned about what potential evacuees might send: a photo of

someone's father after he'd been shot in the head, a video of someone's brother being shoved into the trunk of a car before it sped off.

As Parker spoke to CNN, CBS News, and *The New York Times*, evangelizing Team America's work, word spread wide. The San Francisco-based collaboration software company Airtable reached out, and within two days had custom-built a cloud-based database to help streamline Team America's process. Now case managers could more easily add gigabytes of photos and sort through different fields—green card status, say, or number of people in an individual family—in ways they were unable to with a Google Sheet. They could also share comprehensive data with the special operators on the ground. The Raleigh, North Carolina-based authentication firm Rownd got involved too, providing Afghans with a widget that allowed them to redact all of their data from Airtable at the press of a button before they reached a Taliban checkpoint, where their phones would assuredly be searched. Once they'd made it through, they could easily toggle back on, letting Team America know they were still awaiting help. Rownd CEO Robert Thelen, a veteran, became one of Team America's chief technology officers. Because it wasn't tax season, all 75 on staff at the St. Louis-based accounting firm Hauk Kruse & Associates joined as case managers for the final days, applying their skills at scrubbing W-2s and 1099s to scrubbing passports and green cards.

As high-tech as Team America had become, escapes also often came down to luck. A few days before the deadline, Saboe got a call from Anil D'Souza, one of the Graybeards, who explained that a woman named Sumaia and her 3-year-old son were trying to get out and reunite with her husband, Raz, a former marine interpreter who had obtained a Special Immigrant Visa in 2015 and was now a truck driver in Wisconsin. Saboe contacted her and learned that she wasn't far from a location where a marine working with Team America was meeting other Afghans to escort them through the gates. Sumaia would have to get there quickly.

Because she neither had time to go pack nor buy that day's near recognition signal, a blue pen light, Saboe asked her to snap and send a selfie. He noticed a bright green folder protruding from her backpack and decided to make that her signal, which he relayed to the marine. And because she spoke only Dari, Saboe also recruited his wife's friend, a fluent speaker, to call Sumaia and teach her how to pronounce one name in English that would serve as a password.

Sumaia waded some 150 meters through thick, knee-deep sewage, while Raz's brother, who was also hoping to escape, carried his nephew on his shoulders. About an hour in, she'd become too cold to continue and they climbed out, missing the meetup time. Then she realized she'd lost her phone in the canal. Two hours passed as they lost their way in the crowd. The marine happened to be walking by when, across the canal, amid the sea of people, his eyes spotted a bright green folder, and a boy perched atop a pair of shoulders.

The marine crossed the canal and asked Sumaia who she was looking for.

"Pete," she said.

Sumaia and her son eventually made their way to Wisconsin, reuniting with Raz. They were Chalk-0361. However, as the uncle was on Team America's list and didn't have any documents with him, he had to say goodbye at the sewage canal. He remains in hiding with most of his family.

For every plane that boarded, Team America heard from many more Afghans looking to find one of the final flights out. Outside the gates, the melee turned deadlier when, five days before the deadline, a suicide bomb detonated at Abbey Gate, killing 11 marines, an Army soldier, a Navy corpsman, and 170 Afghan civilians. In response, US troops began welding the gates shut. Then, early on August 30, Saboe got a call from a high-ranking military official, with a heads-up: There would be no flights out on August 31.

"You're not getting the last 24," the person said.

At 11:59 pm on August 30, Kabul time, a C-17 cargo plane cleared the runway. The final transport was gone. Team America sent texts to dozens of Afghans who'd made their way toward the gates, urging them to leave and go into hiding. Zac Martin got a call from a former interpreter now living in the Pacific Northwest; nine members of his family had made it a few yards from the gate. "They all...dead," he screamed. Saboe called an all-hands, thanked everyone for their work, and advised them, for their own mental health, to look away from what was about to come. For those who didn't get out, it was going to be very bad. There was sobbing on the Zoom call. In two weeks, Team America and Task Force Dunkirk had gotten just shy of 500 people out of Kabul. Over 30,000 Afghans remained in their database.

Aftermath

Team America spent most of September dark, with volunteers returning to the lives they'd put on near complete hold. By the end of the evacuation, Saboe had been working on the project 20 hours a day—taking calls on the toilet; coordinating movements with Afghans while dropping his daughters off on their first days of school; and running an ever-growing, multinational operation from his home office. In the weeks after, he wasn't sleeping, his speech was slurred, his patience nonexistent. He seethed as he watched President Biden tout the "extraordinary success" of the American withdrawal from Kabul, knowing so many were left behind and watching his team's database continue to expand.

Some of the Afghans reaching out to Team America were in grave and immediate danger. In late September, one frantically messaged his case manager while members of the Taliban pounded on his door, asking if he should kill his wife and kids before committing suicide so that they would at least be spared further abuse. The case manager pleaded with him not to do it. The man was carted off and beaten badly before being returned to his family. His fate remains unknown. Many other hopeful evacuees simply went dark.

The group wasn't sure if it would resume operations. But as the pleas for help kept coming in, and with evacuations by the State Department at a virtual standstill since August 30, Team America decided to come back online in October. That month, through a connection with one of the Graybeards, they began meeting twice a week with officials from the State Department. The team's crowdsourced database, far superior to the hodgepodge of Excel sheets the government was working with, essentially became the State Department's de facto data set. Team America provided the names, photos, and visa-approval paperwork of the Afghans who were most ready to be evacuated. State would then give the group's case managers the date when each person would have a seat on a transport out of Kabul.

Among them was Zia. Born and raised in Wardak, three hours east of Kabul, Zia (who asked that WIRED use only his first name) had worked with US forces as a logistics and IT specialist and applied for a Special Immigrant Visa in 2018. In January 2021, the US Embassy in Kabul assigned him an interview for July, then bumped it to early August. He traveled to the capital and got his visa, but as he was searching for a flight out for his wife, his younger sister, and himself, Kabul fell to the Taliban. He couldn't find a flight or reach anyone in the US before August 31.

For months, Zia and his family moved from one relative's home to another, spending most of their days locked inside. He stared out of windows, taking note of anyone approaching the house. He looked online for people who could help and found many purported volunteer evacuation organizations. He'd heard that some might be traps set by the Taliban, but he figured he had no choice but to try. He filled out more than 50 forms.

On October 30, Zia received an email from Tracey Meschberger Gifford, a Team America case manager in Colorado, asking for his passport number. He sent his number, his wife's, and his 15-year-old sister's. A few days later, Gifford wrote back, asking for a photo of Zia holding his open passport against his chest. Fearing that he might be falling for a Taliban ruse, he consulted with his family. Send the photo, they told him. On November 15, Zia got another email informing him that the three of them would have seats on a flight from Kabul to Qatar on November 27.

It wasn't until he was added to a WhatsApp group chat and saw the +1 country code denoting an American phone number that Zia believed they might truly get out. On November 25, someone on the group chat

told him to keep an eye out for another number—Afghan this time—of a person who would be asking Zia to bring them the three passports. The sun sets early in November in Kabul, which gave Zia ample time to move under cover of night to bring the passports to the designated drop point and then to retrieve them the next day. A subsequent message told him that his family would be on a flight the following day.

Before heading to the airport, Zia’s wife strapped everyone’s documents to her bare stomach. They made it through the checkpoint, then the gate, and boarded a flight to Qatar, then to New Jersey. They settled in the Denver area in February.

IN NOVEMBER 2021, Saboe received an official memo from the deputy chief of the Defense Intelligence Agency, thanking him for Team America’s work. It read, in part, “The way of warfare will never be the same. And even more so for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.” In January, Saboe stepped down from his role leading the team to return his attention to his company and his family. Still he keeps his eyes and ears on the group, continues a friendship with Zia, and in August his family had the Hidaïs over for qubuli pulao, the national dish of Afghanistan, days after the one-year anniversary of their escape.

Some 30 regular volunteers keep Team America running. Many are like Katherine Schuette, a former military intelligence officer who, after her day job in human resources, opens Airtable, where each entry is a life trying to find a way out, many of them in hiding. This spring, the group hit a late-era high when 37 Afghans boarded a single flight out of Kabul, thanks to information from their database. Some weeks, they get zero people out. In many ways, it’s now easier for Afghans with the requisite paperwork to get through Taliban checkpoints and board a plane bound for safer places. But the work is slow. An operation in which things changed in minutes and often seconds now works on a timeline of months, even years. It has become, as one Team America case manager called it, a “tyranny of paper,” where the proper documentation is more valuable than any safe house or near recognition signal.

To date, Team America and Task Force Dunkirk have gotten more than 1,500 Afghans safely out of Kabul. Schuette estimates that an additional 2,000 might eventually, via a green card status or Special Immigrant Visa, be able to board a flight to America and be marked “Mission Complete,” as five of Zac Martin’s former interpreter’s family now are. (The other four are still alive, it turns out, and still in the database.) In total, that is 5 percent of the Team America database. Some 65,000 other people—all of them hoping to escape a country where starvation is rampant, the economy has collapsed, and schools are closed to the vast majority of girls—will likely remain on the lists forever. It can be hard, the case managers say, to come home from work, open Airtable, and see the unending rows of names. Instead, they try to focus on a single row at a time and remind themselves of the motto Worth Parker and Task Force Dunkirk used as their rallying cry during the mad dash last August: “Just one more.”

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 WMO: rare ‘triple-dip’ La Nina in 2022
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/droughts-united-nations-weather-climate-and-environment-d81072d4b78112256e9807ba4178ae1c
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. weather agency is predicting that the phenomenon known as La Nina is poised to last through the end of this year, a mysterious “triple dip” — the first this century — caused by three straight years of its effect on climate patterns like drought and flooding worldwide.</p> <p>The World Meteorological Organization on Wednesday said La Nina conditions, which involve a large-scale cooling of ocean surface temperatures, have strengthened in the eastern and central equatorial Pacific with an increase in trade winds in recent weeks.</p> <p>The agency’s top official was quick to caution that the “triple dip” doesn’t mean global warming is easing.</p>

	<p>“It is exceptional to have three consecutive years with a La Nina event. Its cooling influence is temporarily slowing the rise in global temperatures, but it will not halt or reverse the long-term warming trend,” WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said.</p> <p>La Nina is a natural and cyclical cooling of parts of the equatorial Pacific that changes weather patterns worldwide, as opposed to warming caused by the better-known El Nino — an opposite phenomenon. La Nina often leads to more Atlantic hurricanes, less rain and more wildfires in the western United States, and agricultural losses in the central U.S.</p> <p>Studies have shown La Nina is more expensive to the United States than the El Nino.</p> <p>Together El Nino, La Nina and the neutral condition are called ENSO, which stands for El Nino Southern Oscillation, and they have one of the largest natural effects on climate, at times augmenting and other times dampening the big effects of human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas, scientists say.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Wuhan lab detects brand new virus in mice
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-11160447/Wuhan-lab-centre-Covid-cover-claims-detects-brand-NEW-virus.html
GIST	<p>A brand new virus has been detected at the Chinese laboratory at the centre of Covid's origin.</p> <p>Researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology discovered the pathogen — code-named LsPyV KY187 — in a mouse.</p> <p>It belongs to a family of polyomaviruses which infect millions of children every year but are extremely mild.</p> <p>Scientists at the controversial lab made the find after testing hundreds of rodents in Kenya in 2016 and 2019.</p> <p>Samples were then sent for analysis at the biochemical research facility in Wuhan, the city at the epicentre of the Covid pandemic.</p> <p>The new polyomavirus was detected in a striped grass mouse, sometimes known as a zebra mouse.</p> <p>It was revealed in a study published in the Chinese journal Virologica Sinica this month.</p> <p>Because the new virus is not closely related to any known pathogen, its effect on people is 'unclear and needs to be further assessed', the researchers said.</p> <p>The discovery highlights how it is business as usual at the Wuhan lab, despite lingering questions about its ties to the pandemic.</p> <p>Covid began spreading in an animal slaughter market about eight miles from the WIV, which worked with dangerous coronaviruses.</p> <p>Chinese officials stifled independent investigations into the lab and wiped crucial databases containing information about the earliest Covid patients.</p> <p>WIV researchers who fell ill with a mysterious flu-like virus months before the official Covid timeline were silenced or disappeared.</p> <p>The so-called lab-leak hypothesis was dismissed as conspiracy or xenophobia in early 2020. But, as time has gone on, the theory has gained traction.</p>

Experts at the WIV worked extensively on bat and other animal coronaviruses and were known to be experimenting on Covid's closest known relatives.

It was also carrying out controversial gain of function experiments which involve tinkering with viruses to make them more infectious or deadly.

But there has never been any direct evidence that Covid first jumped to humans at the facility.

And new research appears to support the idea the Huanan Seafood Market was the true source of the pandemic.

The latest study, which was submitted to the scientific journal last November, involved taken samples from 232 animals in five counties in Kenya.

They were collected on two occasions — in August and September 2016 and March 2019.

Researchers looked at 226 mice and rats, five shrews and one hedgehog, all of which are known harbourers of zoonotic infectious diseases — those that jump to people.

The samples were sent back to the WIV for PCR analysis.

Liver, lung and kidney tissue of each animal were screened for the presence of DNA viruses of seven families.

In total 25 animals tested positive. In all but one case the samples were traced back to pre-existing viruses.

But further analysis showed the new virus polyomavirus was only a 60 per cent match to its closest relative.

Writing in the paper, the researchers said the new virus was 'not closely related to any virus known to cause disease in their small mammal hosts or in humans.'

They added: 'Their pathogenicity [ability to cause disease in humans] and potential risk of zoonotic transmission are unclear and need to be further assessed.'

Around 80 per cent of adults have had a polyomavirus infection at some point in their life, most commonly in childhood.

The virus lives in the upper respiratory tract and people usually have no symptoms at all.

It is never fully flushed from the body and stays dormant throughout a person's entire life - but most will never realise.

In very rare circumstances in immunosuppressed patients, the virus can reactivate and multiply, causing kidney or even brain damage.

Meanwhile, the Wuhan researchers also highlight the importance of continuing to carry out virus research on animals.

'As there are increasing agricultural activities into the natural habitats of rodents in Africa, it highlights the necessity of continued surveillance over a wide-scale area, which could involve larger sample size and apply more high-throughput detection methods.

'Pathogenicity studies of novel viral pathogens are also required in future investigation.

	'Such programs will contribute an important baseline for future prevention and control of emerging zoonotic diseases.'
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 More smoke marijuana than cigarettes
SOURCE	https://www.fox5ny.com/news/marijuana-cigarette-use-americans-poll
GIST	<p>A majority of people say they smoke marijuana more than cigarettes, based on data from a new Gallup poll.</p> <p>Sixteen percent of Americans say they currently smoke marijuana with 48% of respondents sharing that they have tried it at some point in their life — the highest rate ever recorded by Gallup. Last year, 12% of respondents said they used marijuana.</p> <p>The poll released on Aug. 16 was part of a study that examined people's attitudes regarding marijuana's benefits to society.</p> <p>Gallup's poll finds that marijuana use was higher among adults between the ages of 18 and 34 with 30% responding that they smoke pot and 22% consume marijuana edibles. These numbers are significantly lower in both categories for adults 35 to 54 years old (16%) and Americans 55 and older (7%).</p> <p>The analytics and research company conducted a related poll on Aug. 26 that collected responses for a survey discussing alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use among Americans.</p> <p>A new record low of 11% of adults reported smoking cigarettes with approximately three in 10 nonsmokers stating they used to smoke, a steep drop in cigarette use compared to 45% in the 1950s.</p> <p>In 2019, Gallup conducted a poll that found 83% of people believed smoking is "very harmful" compared to 14% who responded that it's "somewhat harmful." More than nine in 10 adults agreed smoking caused cancer. Approximately 91% of smokers interviewed by Gallup in 2015 said they wished they never started smoking.</p> <p>With marijuana use higher among most Americans, the poll reveals that Americans are divided in their views on marijuana, but support for legalization is still large.</p> <p>Gallup held phone interviews with 1,013 people 18 or older in all 50 states and Washington, DC. When asked what effect they thought marijuana had on society, 49% of respondents said it was positive, while 50% said cannabis has negatively impacted society.</p> <p>However, 68% of adults think marijuana should be legal, Gallup shared. Most adults who have ever tried marijuana believe its effects on users and society as a whole are positive. The survey revealed that 72% of people who have never tried marijuana think it's bad for society.</p> <p>Senate bill would decriminalize marijuana In July, three prominent Senate Democrats introduced legislation to decriminalize marijuana at the federal level, despite slim chances that the bill will pass.</p> <p>The Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act, introduced by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Sens. Cory Booker and Ron Wyden, would remove marijuana from the list of federal controlled substances, but it could still be outlawed at the state level.</p> <p>Recreational marijuana is legal in 19 states, Washington, D.C., and Guam, while 37 states allow some form of medical marijuana. Six states could vote on ballot measures legalizing marijuana in the November midterm elections, and should they pass, will join those 19 states.</p> <p>House passes bill to legalize marijuana known as MORE Act</p>

	<p>On April 1, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to pass legislation to legalize marijuana at the federal level, one step closer to decriminalizing cannabis in the United States.</p> <p>Though 18 states have legalized recreational use and 37 allow for some sort of medical marijuana, the remaining federal prohibition has created headaches for the industry in states where it is legal — making it hard for businesses to get banking services and loans.</p> <p>Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act, is expected to face strong headwinds in the Senate — its debate and vote in April gave House lawmakers the chance to state their views on a decriminalization push.</p> <p>The MORE Act would essentially remove marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act list and decriminalize it. The measure would require federal courts to expunge prior marijuana convictions and conduct resentencing hearings for those completing their sentences.</p> <p>The bill passed with a mostly party-line vote of 220-204. All but two voting Democrats backed the measure, while only three Republicans did. It still needs approval in the Senate before it could head to President Joe Biden’s desk to be signed into law.</p>
	Return to Top

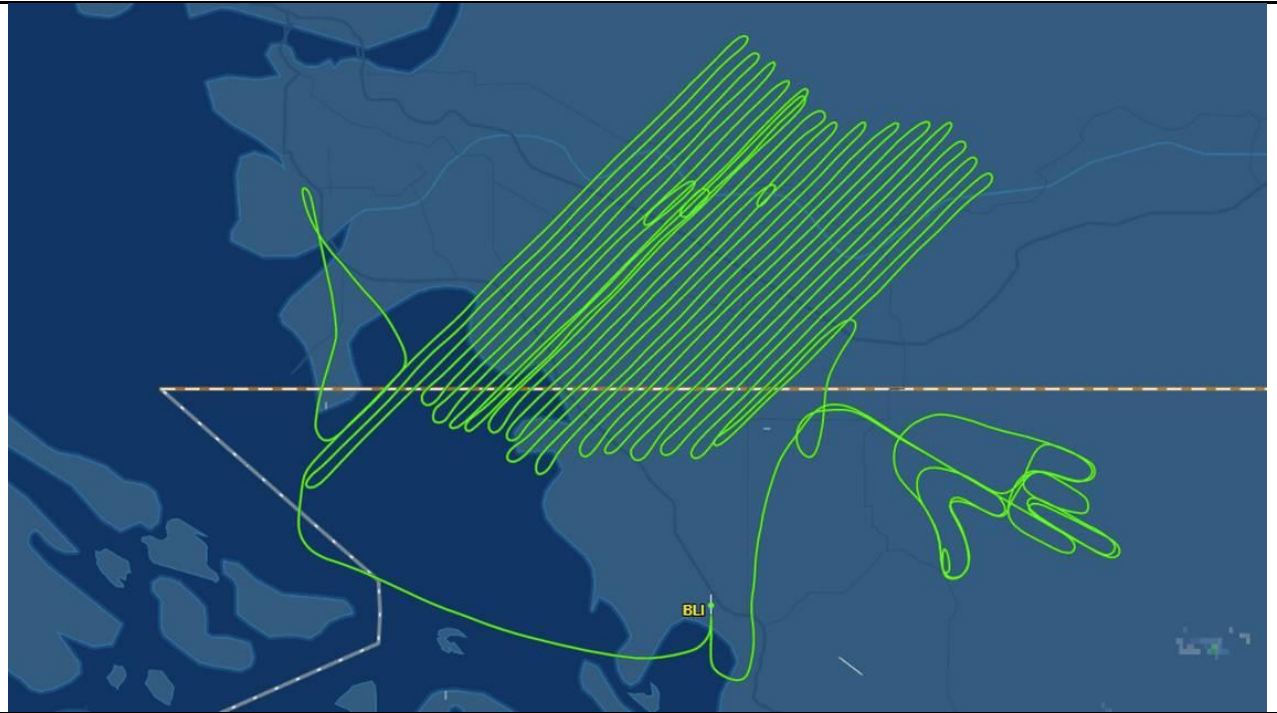
HEADLINE	08/30 Pilot in plane ‘flips’ off Whatcom Co.
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article265096764.html
GIST	<p>Ever have one of those days — especially on a Monday? One where you just wanna flip off everyone?</p> <p>A pilot apparently had some strong feelings — or at least some extra time and fuel — to show Whatcom County what he thought of it, as flight tracking data shows he traced the image of a hand with an extended middle finger above the county Monday, Aug. 29.</p> <p>Though the county’s skies were cloudless, it’s likely nobody, except the pilot, knew what he was tracing at the time he or she was doing so.</p> <p>According to flight tracking data on flightaware.com, the plane took off at 9:15 a.m. Monday from Bellingham International Airport headed north toward the border, but turned to the east near the Lynden area and began tracing “the bird“ outline east of Nooksack.</p> <p>After taking a little more than a half hour to give his version of a one-finger salute at approximately 11,000 feet, the pilot did a number of tight zig-zags back and forth across northern Whatcom County and British Columbia airspace east of Vancouver, before returning and touching down in Bellingham at 4:09 p.m.</p> <p>Though the pilot’s identity is not listed in the data associated with the flight, the plane’s tail number (N59906) shows that it was a Piper Navajo twin-piston (PA31) that is registered to Marc, Inc. in Bolton, Mississippi. According to Marc’s website, it is “North America’s largest provider of specialized contract aircraft and flight crews for airborne GIS (airborne geophysical surveys), surveys and surveillance projects.”</p> <p>The Bellingham Herald has reached out to the company for comment about Monday’s “unusual” flight path by one of its planes.</p> <p>Before being purchased by Marc in 2007, the plane had a brief history with the U.S. Department of Justice, the plane’s flightaware registration record shows.</p> <p>The middle finger flight path was first pointed out on Reddit with a post headlined “Looks like a Survey Pilot’s last day today.” As of Tuesday afternoon, the post had more than 700 comments, many marveling at the pilot’s craftsmanship and level of detail.</p>

“Talk about detail, he even put a thumbnail on!” one commenter said on the post.

“Must be a pro at Etch A Sketch,” another commenter quipped.

Monday’s Whatcom flip off also brings to mind a 2017 incident, when a pilot of a warplane from U.S. Naval Air Station Whidbey traced out a giant image of male genitals in the skies above Okanogan County. Unlike Monday’s artwork over Whatcom County, the Okanogan incident was traced in contrails, which were photographed and posted to social media, and the aircrew ended up being grounded by the Navy.

[Return to Top](#)



HEADLINE	08/30 Violent, lawless erasure of the Amazon
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/brazil-amazon-deforestation-enforcement/?itid=hp-top-table-main
GIST	<p>BRASILÉIA, Brazil — Daniel Valle sped down Highway 317, closing in on the first targets of the day. He was in a hurry. Deforestation alerts had tripled in recent weeks. Police were warning that armed criminal groups had invaded new territory. Another season of destroying the Amazon rainforest was here, and in this corner, the only check on the looming ecological disaster was this: Valle’s small team of inspectors in a dirt-splattered pickup truck.</p> <p>“This is it,” said Valle, 39, pulling off the highway. A roving state environmental inspector, he traveled throughout this remote land that was increasingly under threat from a wave of destruction that had leveled the forests to the east. His job was to slow its advance. The challenge felt futile most days. But especially today.</p> <p>His crew was in southern Acre, where the federal government under President Jair Bolsonaro — a longtime critic of environmental regulation — no longer staffed a single inspector. That meant his state agency, the Acre Environmental Institute, now bore the burden of enforcing environmental law in this area of more than 3,600 square miles along the border with Bolivia.</p> <p>Valle pulled out his target list. The map showed 16 points of illegal devastation — pinpricks of red piercing an expanse of green and brown.</p> <p>He sighed. This was enough work for two weeks. Not the two days they’d been given.</p>

“We don’t have enough people,” Valle said.

This mismatch — too few inspectors for too much deforestation — is one of a cascading series of shortfalls and failures that are enabling criminals to raze the world’s largest rainforest with impunity. Law enforcement misses the majority of deforestation in the Amazon. The fines that the few state and federal inspectors here write are seldom paid. The occasional cases that spill into the criminal justice system languish for years. And in the rare instance of a criminal conviction, it almost never draws a prison sentence, The Washington Post found in a review of a year’s worth of cases.

The violent and lawless erasure of the Amazon is perhaps the world’s greatest environmental crime story. Scientists warn that the forest, seen as vital to averting catastrophic global warming, is at a tipping point. But in Brazil, home to about 60 percent of the Amazon, nearly one-fifth has already been destroyed. And virtually no one, law enforcement officials say, has been held accountable.

“No one goes to jail,” said Luciano Evaristo, former chief inspection officer of Ibama, the federal environmental law enforcement agency. “For example, in 2016, we took apart a large deforestation ring in the south of Pará state. They deforested 50 square miles. There were 23 arrests. In the end, no one’s in jail. And this was the biggest deforestation ring in Brazil.”

Environmental agencies have similarly struggled to punish even those accused of only minor deforestation — such as the man the inspection team was driving to visit. At the end of the path, they found rancher Francisco Nonato de Souza coming out of his house. They accused him of illegally deforesting 45 acres and handed him a \$17,000 fine.

Nonato glowered. He looked at the crew’s heavily armed police escort.

“You come out here for this bit of deforestation but do nothing about the guys who deforest 120 or 150 acres?” he said. “Those guys over there” — his chin jutting into the distance — “they knocked it all down. Burned it. Planted grass. Nothing happened to them.”

Valle defended their work. Nonato was the first on their list in southern Acre. But they still had 15 cases to investigate.

The rancher was unmoved.

“They knock it all down,” he said. “And nothing happens.”

Valle didn’t reply; he knew environmental authorities were about to fall even further behind. His was the only inspection team that traveled throughout the state. The year was shaping up to be perfect for deforestation: hot and dry. And the last agent to perform inspections from the south Acre field office, disillusioned by the mission and tired of the risks it entailed, had just announced he was quitting. So when tomorrow came, and Valle’s crew departed for another part of the state, they’d be leaving the forest here defenseless.

More than 3,600 square miles. And no one to enforce the environmental law.

THE FOREST BURNS. FEW PAY.

Brazil had once promised something different. Rising from the yoke of a military dictatorship that had promoted rapacious development of the Amazon, the country vowed a radical new approach to the environment. The 1988 constitution described the environment as “essential” and called upon the government and civil society to safeguard it. Soon came official plans to crack down on deforesters, and the law enforcement agencies to do it.

The tools: Fines that could soar into the millions. Land-use embargoes that prohibited the commercial use of illegally deforested or degraded land. Criminal charges that could put deforesters in prison.

“A revolution” is how former environment minister Marina Silva described it in an interview.

But in the decades since, law enforcement officials say, nearly every tool has been dulled to the point of ineffectiveness, snagged by bureaucracy, case overloads and a grinding appellate system that has long stymied the country’s criminal justice system. The atrophy has deprived Brazil of what should be its most potent weapons against deforestation: credible regulations and the threat of consequences for those who violate them.

“It’s the economic theory of crime,” said Jair Schmidt, a government environmental analyst who studies law enforcement failings. “Will you make more money from deforestation than you stand to lose if you are cited for an infraction?”

In the beginning, the answer was unclear. Ibama, the country’s chief environmental enforcement agency, was founded in 1989 and professionalized with a civil service exam in 2002. It would be years before it was writing more than 10,000 citations a year. Then years more before deforesters knew how seriously to take them. Between 2004 and 2012, according to government data, deforestation fell 83 percent.

But there was a hidden flaw: As the number of citations rose, the number of people charged with adjudicating them didn’t. The backlog swelled. Thousands of cases languished, some for as long as 15 years. At least 28,100 fines issued since 2000 have expired, government records show, because of the statute of limitations. Between 10 and 15 percent of fines are paid. But they are the smallest ones, law enforcement officials say, for the pettiest abuses. Less than 1 percent of the money owed for environmental abuse is generally paid, according to government audits.

“Infractions aren’t generating the dissuasive effect that they should have,” Ibama officials reported this year in an internal technical note obtained by The Post. “Offenders think it’s worth it to continue with their undue use of natural resources and that the risk of timely punishment is low.”

Ibama didn’t respond to requests for comment.

In the federal criminal justice system, which adjudicates more-serious allegations of environmental abuse, the risk of punishment is just as slight.

“What you saw in your analysis is what we see every day,” said Daniel Azeredo, a federal attorney who has led some of the government’s largest prosecutions of accused deforesters. “We don’t have people in prison for environmental crimes. What we do have is a trade. We are trading massive areas of the Amazon for very small punitive penalties.”

Offenders enjoy several advantages in the court system. Crimes of deforestation are limited to maximum sentences of four years. The appellate system effectively freezes cases. And the legal resources at the command of deforesters are enormous — many hire expensive defense attorneys now specialized in environmental law.

Prosecutors named grocery store owner Ezequiel Antônio Castanha the “Amazon’s biggest deforester” in 2014 and won a conviction in 2019. But Castanha was not sent to prison. (Prosecutors are appealing. Castanha declined to comment.) Federal attorneys called São Paulo businessman A.J. Vilela the same thing in 2016. But his case is still pending. (Vilela didn’t respond to requests for comment. He has denied any wrongdoing.) José Lopes, one of the Amazon’s biggest farmers, was accused by federal attorneys in 2019 of forming a militia to invade public lands and conduct “large-scale deforestation,” but never convicted. (Lopes contested the charges. Citing a lack of evidence, prosecutors have requested a dismissal.)

In the Amazon, nearly 95,000 people were incarcerated as of December. But only one-tenth of 1 percent of them were being held for an environmental crime, according to the National Prison Department.

There isn't a state in the Brazilian Amazon that doesn't face illegal deforestation, but in some, not one person was incarcerated for environmental abuse.

One such state was Acre, where a state environmental agent named Marcel Pedralino had decided to call it quits.

'I'M NO MARTYR'

At the field office of the Acre Environmental Institute, the requests had been piling up for weeks. One was from a local judge, asking for verification that a ranch was respecting a land embargo. Another came from a judicial official wanting a deforestation investigation on 45 remote acres. And in the back of the sleepy office, one more request now sat on Pedralino's desk.

Pedralino, the last person in the office who investigated such infractions, squinted at the page. "Damage to the forest," a colleague had written. "Uncontrolled fire."

He looked around. Shuffled some files.

"Where is that stack of papers?" Pedralino asked.

He opened the cupboard behind him and pulled out a beige envelope. It was stuffed with all the complaints of deforestation that had never been investigated. There were dozens: "They burned all of the vegetation protecting the creek," one reported. "Seventy acres already destroyed by fire," another said. "Illegal extraction of wood," added a third.

Pedralino put the additional report on the top. He closed the folder and placed it back in the filing cabinet.

He was done. His paperwork was signed, delivered and approved. He no longer worked here. He now was employed by the state sanitation service, a prospect he found far more enticing than defending the Amazon. No one gets killed tinkering with sewer systems.

"I'm no martyr," he said. He wasn't even an environmentalist. He of all people, he believed, didn't deserve to go down like the [cop ambushed and killed in 2016](#) after an environmental bust in Pará state. Or the government worker [shot dead](#) in 2019 while investigating illegal fishing in Amazonas. He didn't want to be attacked like the Ibama agents who [came under fire](#) in 2020 in Roraima state and to not have a way to respond. The agency didn't give him a gun. It didn't provide a bulletproof vest. He didn't even have a car. The office truck had been in the shop for weeks. No one knew when they were getting it back.

Pedralino glanced to his right. Elaine da Silva was typing at her computer. She was also authorized to perform inspections, but had never done one in the region and had no plans to. Not without an armed escort, which police almost never provided to the field office, unlike for Valle's team of inspectors. No environmental offender, she believed, would listen to her, a Black woman, anyway.

So here they sat, gunless, carless, with 3,600 square miles to patrol and limited resources to do it. "Give me a hand with this property registry," da Silva told Pedralino, dropping a form on his desk. With no other work to do, he gave it a look.

It hadn't always been like this. When Pedralino joined the agency in 2012, the government had seemed [on the cusp of](#) eliminating illegal deforestation. Each federal and state environmental agency staffed an inspection force. Pedralino would travel down distant roads, hand out the tickets and be on his way, free of concern for his safety.

But that was before the election of Bolsonaro. Before Bolsonaro's environmental minister met with [gold miners](#), [loggers](#) and [land grabbers](#). Before the number of Ibama inspectors plummeted. Before Acre's conservative new governor [told](#) accused environmental offenders not to pay fines issued by state

inspectors. Before the rise of a politics of grievance that presented deforesters not as criminals, but as honest workers oppressed by authoritarian environmentalists. And before Pedralino realized that this job, a job for which he felt no personal affinity, was putting his life at risk.

He had always considered himself willing to do whatever was necessary to perform his work. But now, when asked to investigate deforestation, all he could see was the violence that might happen. He remembered when dozens of angry ranchers, some of them armed, surrounded his truck in 2013. He thought about the illegal logger who went to get something from his house, and Pedralino was sure it was a gun. He heard his own pleas, begging visiting environmental agents in 2019 not to destroy the logging equipment they'd confiscated — because that could trigger retaliation, and he was the one who lived here and would have to suffer the consequences.

The stress got to be too much. So late last year, Pedralino complained to his bosses that it was nearly impossible to investigate environmental wrongdoing without security. Then in early July, with nothing having changed, he told them he was quitting. And now it was a week later, and he was standing up from his desk, not feeling a bit of regret.

There was only one matter that caused him remorse: the thought that other inspectors were out there now, patrolling territory he refused to go into, taking on risks he could no longer stomach.

“That’s the hardest thing to face,” he said, “But, maybe it will prolong my life.”

FIGHTING THE FUTURE

Sixteen points of deforestation on the map. One now done. Fifteen to go.

Daniel Valle pulled out his target map, feeling a swell of annoyance. The phone he held was his own. The mapping app he used to locate the deforestation was a free promo. The Acre Environmental Institute hadn’t even provided the targets. They came from the state police.

Every shortfall cost time. Not having a mobile printer meant losing 30 minutes writing fines by hand. Having no access to property records meant personally pinpointing on which ranch the deforestation had occurred. Too few inspectors meant they had to drive hours just to reach their targets.

Sometimes during those long drives, they got to thinking that their challenges had been imposed intentionally, that they weren’t employed to fight deforestation but to provide political cover. So that Acre could say it was combating deforestation when really it wasn’t.

“We’re pushing with our bellies,” fellow inspector Josmario Santos Guimarães said during one such conversation, using a Brazilian expression that means not doing much of anything.

“The agencies have been shrunk so much,” lead inspector Ivan de Jesus Pereira de Araújo e Silva said during another.

Valle looked up from his map. He grabbed the wheel.

“We’ll take advantage of our current location,” he said. “This next point is close to our last inspection.”

It was easy to get frustrated, but Valle couldn’t picture himself doing any other work. Raised on a rural commune, he’d always felt connected to the forest. He remembered the cool Amazon mornings of his childhood — “cold enough to kill a monkey,” his grandmother would say — and his fear when he learned that not only was the biome in danger but that its demise could threaten the world.

He decided there could be no better way to spend his life than defending something so important. But over the years, as more of the forest disappeared, and temperatures rose, and mornings cold enough to kill monkeys grew rarer, the idealism with which he’d entered the profession was infected by cynicism. Most days, he didn’t feel like he was fighting deforestation. He was fighting the future.

They passed dirt roads branching off the highway. Each of these, he believed, was opening more territory to illegal deforestation. Some days, he'd find illegal loggers mowing away with their chain saws. Other days, blackened embers smoking from a recent blaze, or trucks laboring under the weight of giant logs. But every day, he'd hear the same story. Deforesters saying they'd done it to survive, to feed their families.

Was it the truth? Maybe for some. Not for others.

And he was about to hear it again.

The inspectors were arriving at a 500-acre cattle ranch. An unshaven Mârcio Silva de Melo, 41, had been accused of hacking down 20 acres of forest. The cattleman looked down at his muddy boots. He said he'd done it to widen his pasture. He wanted more money to support his two daughters, ages 14 and 3.

He felt embittered. First the government had left him without support out here, he said. Now it wanted to fine him \$8,000 for doing what was necessary to survive. That money, he said, would "come out of the mouths of my daughters."

Valle listened, relieved there was no violence in the man's voice. No one knew whether accused deforesters were armed, or how they would react. The inspectors took what precautions they could — never work alone, take security escorts, treat everyone with respect — but still, the job had become more dangerous. Just the other week, his crew had inspected a farm occupied by a man convicted of organizing the murder of a female American missionary in 2005. They now relied on police to tell them where it was safe to go — and where their presence would bring trouble.

Hoping that the next stop wouldn't, they plunged deeper into the forest. The path led toward a huge ranching complex ringed by illegal deforestation.

A dozen men emerged from the shadows of a building. No one said anything for a long moment.

"Let the police get out first," Valle said.

Property owner Luiz Ricardo Fernandez Leon, 56, came out to greet the inspectors, uncertain and unsmiling. Valle walked with him to the shaded porch of a farmhouse, where he said they'd discovered more than 200 acres of illegal deforestation on his property. As the rancher's men watched, Fernandez Leon was handed several documents: a fine of \$80,000 and an embargo prohibiting him from using the deforested land to grow crops, graze cattle or any other moneymaking activity.

The rancher shook his head and rubbed his eyes. He didn't deny the destruction, but said he would fight the enforcement. Not with force — with lawyers. He planned to appeal the case. It would almost certainly be years before the matter was settled. If it ever was.

"I was not expecting this," Fernandez Leon said. "Five years we've been out here, and I've never seen one government inspector."

Valle knew it was unlikely he'd ever see another. He got back into the truck. A long drive loomed, and the crew had to get moving. Their next destination was along the far eastern tip of the state. Their work here was done.

Sixteen points of deforestation. They'd worked two days, and hadn't even visited half.

A DREAM OF CONSERVATION UNDONE

Back in the office, a phone on Pedralino's desk was vibrating.

He grimaced and picked it up. “It’s me.”

The woman on the other end sounded frantic. Headquarters needed someone to drive into the field and lift an environmental embargo. Could Pedralino go on Monday? He was already shaking his head.

“We don’t even have a car,” he said.

“What?” she said.

“Why don’t you send an email?” he said. “I don’t work here anymore. I now work in sanitation.”

“You work in sanitation?”

He suggested a solution, hung up and went back to his computer. He pulled up Google Earth. He zoomed in to show his house, a property surrounded by forest on all sides. “How I like it,” he said. Then he zoomed back out again.

The screen showed the states of Acre and neighboring Rondônia, side by side, each showing a different side of the debate over the future of the Amazon. Two of the last Brazilian states to be incorporated, they once mirrored one another: remote, forested jurisdictions of similar size and economic power.

Then their paths diverged. Acre, reeling from the 1988 assassination of conservationist Chico Mendes, chose to preserve the environment. It built a sustainable economy around ecological reserves, rubber-tapping and the harvesting of nuts. Rondônia, meanwhile, opened itself up to the cattle industry. Land grabbers stole territories. Armed disputes erupted. In a matter of decades, the state lost nearly 40 percent of its forest.

Today, Rondônia has twice as many people as Acre, three times the economic output and nearly four times as many cars. And its neighbors in Acre, increasingly critical of the conservation efforts their state once championed, want to catch up. In 2018, Acre awarded Bolsonaro 77 percent of its vote — more than any other state. Voters that year also elected a conservative new governor, Gladson Cameli, who has worked to realize Bolsonaro’s vision, growing the cattle industry and deprioritizing conservation.

Critics have lamented what they call the “Rondonization of Acre.” But few doubt that Bolsonaro will win again here in the October elections.

Pedralino zoomed in on Rondônia. The screen showed vast stretches of deforestation. He wanted to believe his 3-year-old daughter would know the Amazon as he had — gargantuan and pristine. But he started to doubt himself. All of this destruction had happened in just his lifetime. “A forest lost in a generation,” he said.

He returned the view to Acre. An expanse of uninterrupted green.

“Could it be possible,” he wondered aloud, “that what happened in Rondônia will now happen here?”

The screen swept toward the eastern tip of the state, where armed land invaders were increasingly aggressive, and where, on the ground, it looked to Valle as if the question was already being answered. He was standing in the forest, looking at a scattering of colossal logs. The inspectors had been sent to try to remove them, but had no idea how. “We’re not going to be able to solve anything here,” one of the inspectors vented, before they left for the next point of deforestation, and the next.

Pedralino closed Google Earth.

He stood up from his desk. He gathered his things and headed to the door. Whether Acre became the next Rondônia or not was no longer his problem. The Amazon would have to find itself a different martyr.

	He walked outside, into the bright afternoon sun, put on his motorcycle helmet and rode off.
Return to Top	

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	08/31 Mexico criminal cartels expand reach
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/31/world/americas/mexico-cartels-violence.html
GIST	<p>CELAYA, Mexico — The butcher had been killed and no one knew why. The execution occurred in broad daylight as he worked in a family-owned restaurant, one of many murders that go unsolved every week in Celaya, among Mexico’s most dangerous cities.</p> <p>His co-workers and family cried and drank tequila to calm their nerves, while a forensic expert walked among tables still covered with food left behind by customers who had fled during the shooting.</p> <p>The plight of this city is part of the worsening security situation across the country. Police in places like Celaya say they are outgunned by criminal gangs in a war they are losing, while the federal forces meant to fight these battles often seem to show up after the shooting is over.</p> <p>Many officials and analysts say that the endless bloodshed — a signal of a government losing control over the country — has been exacerbated by the transformative security strategy put in place by the current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, shortly after taking office, which gutted intelligence operations and so far has failed to quell the carnage.</p> <p>The violence has continued unabated throughout Mexico month after month: For a few days in August, drug cartels and gangs went on a rampage across four states, firing on police and troops, burning businesses and vehicles, and shutting down roads and businesses, including in Celaya. Days later, the son of Celaya’s mayor was assassinated outside a pharmacy. More violence this week forced schools and universities to cancel classes in Zacatecas state.</p> <p>Mr. López Obrador has downplayed the violence under his rule and instead blamed the problem on previous administrations.</p> <p>“Our adversaries are exaggerating,” the president said in a recent news conference. “It’s like staged, it’s propagandistic. There is no major problem, but they do want to grab that banner of violence.”</p> <p>Yet in Celaya, the restaurant attack was just a normal Wednesday afternoon. Seemingly everyone in this city of some 500,000 people in central Mexico knows someone killed or missing. Homicides in the city were up 32 percent in the first four months of the year compared to the same period in 2021. Community volunteers meet weekly to search for bodies. The government is rarely able to prevent violence or bring its perpetrators to justice.</p> <p>Celaya was once a prosperous and peaceful hub in Guanajuato state, with major national highways and railways connecting it to the United States. A vibrant auto industry drew Japanese families to live amid its beautiful colonial architecture, commuting to the factories of Honda and other international companies.</p> <p>But Celaya took a brutal turn about four years ago, as one of Mexico’s most powerful cartels, Jalisco New Generation, battled with a local criminal organization for turf. Now, the local government struggles to assert control over security, and many foreigners and wealthy Mexicans have relocated.</p> <p>“It is called the cockroach phenomenon, they are crossing the borders from one state to another,” Víctor Alejandro Aguilar Ledesma, the Catholic bishop of Celaya, said of the cartels. He said the violence compelled him to speak out, which the church usually avoids. This summer, the nation was stunned</p>

when gunmen executed two priests in northern Mexico after a person they pursued took sanctuary in their church.

The issue, the bishop said, was the government's lack of an effective plan at a national level, an assessment shared by municipal police officials and the chief of security for Guanajuato state.

Mr. López Obrador famously said that his security strategy would be "hugs, not bullets" — investing in communities to combat the poverty that fuels criminality, and dissolving the Federal Police to build a civilian-led National Guard policing force that would be "incorruptible."

But under these changes, Mexico lost nearly half of its intelligence capacity to investigate and dismantle the country's vast criminal networks, feeding the impunity that enables crime.

"What should the government do? Govern. And what should a doctor do? Take care of the sick. A civil engineer? Build roads," said the bishop.

The president denies that Mexico has gotten more violent during the first half of his six-year term, which ends in 2024. Homicides fell by nearly 3 percent from 2018, the year he took office, to the end of 2021, but the cartels have broadened their reach. Last year, violence caused "massive displacement" events that drove 44,905 Mexicans to flee their homes — a nearly fivefold increase from the previous year, according to Mexico's Commission for Defense and Promotion of Human Rights.

As the president prepares to deliver his annual state of the union address, the situation has increasingly frustrated Mexicans: In a poll released this week by El Universal newspaper, more than half of the respondents said that worsening violence shows the federal government's security strategy has failed.

When Mr. López Obrador dismantled the Federal Police in 2019 over documented corruption concerns, he created the new National Guard under the civilian-led Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection to address crime and enable the government to pull the military off the streets. Now, he is expected to transfer that force to the defense ministry.

So far, the National Guard has not delivered the security he promised. Many former Federal Police refused to join because of pay cuts. Others who joined soon left because former military officials leading the National Guard did not treat them as equals, according to police officers interviewed.

The dissolution of the Federal Police also meant Mexico's anti-crime investigative force was nearly halved overnight, according to an American official who spoke anonymously to share sensitive details. The Federal Police had some 10,000 investigators; the National Guard has just a few hundred, the official said.

Alejandro Hope, a Mexico City-based security analyst, analyzed government data and said that although the National Guard is nearly triple the size of its predecessor, it only made about 8,000 arrests last year compared to some 21,700 by the Federal Police in 2018. Only 14 of the National Guard arrests stemmed from intelligence work.

"Without good intelligence and investigative units, you will always be putting out fires and not preventing them from starting," said Cecilia Farfán Méndez, a Mexico security researcher at the University of California San Diego.

Senior Mexican officials agree.

"The intelligence areas that the Federal Police had, they've practically disappeared," said Sophia Huett López, the chief of security for the Guanajuato state government.

"Here, the work of the National Guard is purely patrolling," she said, adding that what was needed was in-depth investigation to take down the criminal organizations.

In Celaya, as in many of Mexico's cities and towns, the municipal police force is too small. According to ratios recommended by the United Nations, a city the size of Celaya should have a 2,300-strong police force; instead it has 900.

The secretary of security for Celaya, Jesús Rivera Peralta, said he had tried to root out graft, and recently fired some 200 police officers for corruption and poor performance.

As in much of Mexico, that corruption is deep-seated. Two Celaya officers who requested anonymity to speak openly complained about finding drugs and backpacks with cartel insignia inside their superiors' vehicles.

With a steady flow of weapons smuggled from the United States, where gun purchase laws are more lax, the gangs outgun the Celaya police. Over the past few months, grenades have been lobbed at police patrols.

"A scene of absolute warfare," Edgar García Carrillo, an emergency room doctor at the city's main hospital, said of one shooting that left eight dead. He estimates that the number of injuries related to violence has tripled in the last four years.

"I've never been in a war, but here you feel as if you are," he said.

Last week, the bodies of a young woman and man were found in an empty field, the stench of decay wafting toward a nearby neighborhood and military preparatory school. Security forces and residents looked on as a forensics specialist in a white zip-up hooded suit took photos of the decomposed cadavers.

After the explosion of violence across Mexico in August, officials from one of Celaya's largest high schools met with Mr. Rivera and his top security officials, begging for more protection from criminals who harass students on the road to school, robbing and selling them drugs.

"Is it possible to set up a surveillance unit nearby?" asked Maura Martínez, a school official. "It's a dream we have, but how possible is it?"

"The issue is that lately, the security checkpoints have become a slaughterhouse for the officers," said Edgar Chávez, a police commander, adding that they would do their best to improve security.

Killings in Celaya surged from fewer than 80 in 2010 to more than 800 in 2020, abating somewhat last year to about 640 — and hundreds have gone missing.

Olimpia Montoya's brother and a friend, an off-duty police officer, set out one day in 2017, and no sign of them has turned up since then. The authorities brushed off the disappearance when her family reported it, claiming, without evidence, that the two men were in a secret relationship and had run off together. It took government forensics experts five years to collect all the DNA they needed from the family to see if it matched any unidentified bodies.

Ms. Montoya no longer believes she will find her brother alive, but hopes to find his body and give him a proper burial that she and her parents can attend.

"They don't want to leave this world not knowing what happened to their son," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Leader drug trafficking gang pleads guilty
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdwa/pr/leader-international-drug-trafficking-organization-pleads-guilty-federal-charges

GIST	<p>Seattle – One of the leaders of a violent international drug trafficking organization that distributed heroin, fentanyl, and methamphetamine in the Puget Sound region pleaded guilty Monday afternoon in U.S. District Court in Seattle. Jose Elias Barbosa, 37, of Kent, Washington, faces a mandatory minimum ten years in prison and up to life in prison when he is sentenced by U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour on December 13, 2022.</p> <p>In his plea agreement, Barbosa admits he was one of the leaders of a transnational drug trafficking organization. Law enforcement has linked the organization to the CJNG cartel in Mexico. In November 2019, the DTO received a shipment of liquid methamphetamine concealed in candles. Barbosa helped DTO members to extract the methamphetamine and cook it into crystal form at a Port Orchard, Washington location. Barbosa was responsible for the distribution of at least 55 pounds of methamphetamine, 600 grams of heroin, and fentanyl throughout Western Washington and elsewhere.</p> <p>Barbosa also pursued those who owed drug debts to the organization and possessed firearms during the drug conspiracy. According to the plea agreement, on one occasion, Barbosa took a car from another DTO member to satisfy a drug debt. Barbosa later threatened that same DTO member.</p> <p>Prosecutors have agreed to recommend no more than 168 months in prison when Barbosa is sentenced in December.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Arrest in shooting 3 Dutch soldiers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/indianapolis-man-arrested-in-shooting-of-3-dutch-soldiers/
GIST	<p>INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indianapolis police arrested a man Tuesday in connection with a shooting over the weekend that left one Dutch soldier dead and two wounded.</p> <p>Shamar Duncan, 22, of Indianapolis, was arrested on a preliminary charge of murder, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department said.</p> <p>Duncan was being held in jail and will not be eligible for release from jail while the Marion County Prosecutor’s Office reviews the case, police said.</p> <p>Duncan’s arrest did not appear in online court records, and it wasn’t clear whether he has an attorney who might comment on the case.</p> <p>A 26-year-old member of the Dutch Commando Corps, identified by U.S. authorities as Simmie Poetsema, died of his injuries “surrounded by family and colleagues,” the Dutch Defense Ministry said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>The shooting occurred Saturday in downtown Indianapolis.</p> <p>“IMPD detectives want to thank members of the community for their cooperation during this investigation,” IMPD spokesman Shane Foley said. “During the investigation, multiple individuals spoke with detectives and provided detectives with video connected to the investigation.”</p> <p>Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren expressed concern Tuesday about gun violence in the United States in the aftermath of the shooting.</p> <p>“We do many trainings of our servicemen in the United States, and we really don’t expect this to happen. So it’s very, very concerning for us.” Ollongren told The Associated Press at a meeting of European Union defense ministers in Prague.</p> <p>Poetsema and the two other soldiers were shot after what Indianapolis police believe was a disturbance outside the hotel where they were staying about 3:30 a.m. Saturday near several downtown bars and nightclubs, authorities said. The soldiers were in the U.S. for training exercises at a southern Indiana military base.</p>

	<p>Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett said Monday that the soldiers had returned to the hotel after a “scuffle” at a bar and were outside when the gunfire came from what he called “a drive-by shooting.”</p> <p>Indianapolis police declined to confirm Hogsett’s account Tuesday or release more information on the circumstances or the investigation of the shooting.</p> <p>Ollongren declined to comment on the shooting while investigations continue. She said there is “good contact” between Dutch military police and authorities in Indianapolis.</p> <p>“We have read things in the media, we have heard what the mayor said but we feel it’s very important to have a real thorough investigation. So we’re waiting for that until we comment on what actually happened,” she said.</p> <p>Ollongren said U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin contacted her Monday “to express his regrets and his condolences.”</p> <p>Hogsett said he believed the city’s downtown area was safe and that city officials were working to reduce violence.</p> <p>“Too often, not just in Indianapolis, conflict resolution has become just people pulling out guns and shooting each other,” Hogsett said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 Oregon store shooter shared plans online
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/epzpw7/oregon-mass-shooter-manifesto-online
GIST	<p>The 20-year-old man who shot and killed two people at an Oregon grocery store before killing himself had planned a much bigger massacre he called "doomsday," which he wanted to be remembered as a "significant event in history," he wrote in online postings.</p> <p>The online screed, written on the blogging website Wattpad and made public 12 hours before the crime, showed exactly how he planned to commit the mass shooting, that he’d hoped to kill as many as 40 people, and that he was ready to die.</p> <p>“I’m OBSESSED with Doomsday now I can hardly contain it!” he wrote. “I can’t wait to Die.”</p> <p>The shooter’s original plan was to shoot up the high school he graduated from on September 8. In one post from early July, he wrote that “yes, Columbine partially inspired this” and that he’d had “a Morbid interest in Shootings for a long time. Especially Columbine.”</p> <p>Shortly before his rampage, the shooter changed his plans and decided to target this particular Safeway in Bend, Oregon, where he had worked in the past.</p> <p>“Fuck It. I’m done waiting. I CAN’T WAIT ANY LONGER,” reads one of the final entries. “The Rage has become uncontrollable and It can’t wait 2 More Weeks...Tomorrow. Sunday. August 28th, 2022. Doomsday.”</p> <p>Soon after that entry, on August 28, Ethan Blair Miller drove to the Safeway with an AR-15-style rifle and a shotgun, exited his vehicle and opened fire on people in the parking lot. He then entered the store and carried on firing, killing two people. He might have killed many more if not for a Safeway employee and Army veteran, Ray Surret Jr., 66, who was killed attempting to disarm the shooter, according to police.</p> <p>“Mr. Surret engaged with the shooter and attempted to disarm him and may very well have prevented further deaths,” police spokeswoman Sheila Miller said at a news conference.</p> <p>Soon after that confrontation, but before police arrived, Miller shot and killed himself.</p>

The online writing, which references the shooter's name and features unique photos, is written in diary form and chronicles eight weeks of planning for the mass shooting.

"If you're reading this then I'm definitely DEAD and have just committed a 'NATIONAL TRAGEDY,'" reads the opening line of the shooters writing. "I'm gonna lay it all out for you all so that by the end of all of this you will all understand why I did what I did. What you'll see here is the documentation and description of the Months/Weeks/Days from Today up until The Massacre."

Since the entries were made public shortly before the shootings, it is not known if they were uploaded in real time or right before the shooting itself. The act of keeping a diary is common for mass killers; the neo-Nazi who killed 10 people in a Buffalo grocery store in May [kept a similar diary on Discord](#).

The shooter also had an Instagram and YouTube page which have since been deleted.

His screed is focused on violence and mass death, somewhat akin to the [disturbing Columbiner subculture](#), rather than one connected to any sort of political ideology. The shooter wrote several times of how excited he was to commit extreme violence and wanted the act to be "remembered as a significant event in history." He routinely referred to himself as "the animal" when speaking about his plan, and said he hoped to kill as many as 40 people.

The writings are overflowing with nihilism and the shooter repeatedly writes how much he hates society and is excited for his own death. The shooter makes sure to adamantly write that he's "not an incel" nor a "white supremacist." However, following his denouncements, he uses several racial slurs and describes women as "fucking fake and shallow."

A frequent topic in the diary is the writer's yearning for "love" and how he was unable to find it. He wrote that he believed he would meet his soulmate who "doesn't exist here" and he would "have to cross over to the other side to finally meet her." The shooter ends the diary with a final goodbye note, the lyrics of several songs in full, and a series of photos.

According to an archived version of the diary, it was read more than 438,000 times before being pulled down.

People who knew the shooter in high school [told local news outlets](#) that he was a violent person prone to confrontations. One even [told Oregon Public Broadcasting that he was](#) "the person from our class most likely to be a school shooter."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Seattle shooting part of 'concerning trend'
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/1-killed-another-injured-deadly-aurora-ave-shooting/281-6cb150fc-bd62-48cd-adac-7373c0635ef5
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Police said one man was shot and killed along Aurora Avenue overnight Tuesday, with Seattle on track to pass a 25-year-high in deadly shootings.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department (SPD) was called to the 14300 block of Aurora Avenue North at about 12:15 a.m. for reports of a person shot. Officers found a 44-year-old man with fatal gunshot wounds and declared him dead at the scene.</p> <p>Another 46-year-old man was taken to Harborview Medical Center with a minor "graze wound," police said.</p> <p>Investigators are not sure if the two victims are connected or what led up to the deadly shooting.</p>

Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz said officers were already in the area of the shooting when they were making a domestic violence arrest. Police said the suspect fled from officers and shot at them just after 11 p.m. Monday night. While they had the suspect in custody, officers heard the gunshots from Aurora Avenue and responded to the scene.

A 'concerning trend'

It's the city's second deadly shooting since Saturday after [one man was killed](#) and another injured in Columbia City. Police investigated two other shootings over the weekend in addition to the homicide. Diaz said Seattle could set a 25-year high in deadly shootings.

"This is one of our highest years and we are on pace to exceed the last two years, and this has been a concerning trend," Diaz said. "We are passing our 25-year high that happened just two years ago."

There were a recorded 53 homicides in 2020, according to the police department's crime dashboard. There were 42 in 2021. There have been 27 so far in 2022.

There were 31 fatal shootings in 2021 and 21 in 2020, according to the department's 2021 Year-End Crime Report.

Diaz said police are doing everything they can to limit violence despite the department reporting 30-year lows in staffing.

"We have a shared responsibility to get guns off the street and we have a shared responsibility to make sure people call 911 if they see situations escalating," Diaz said.

Diaz said the [city's proposed police recruiting plan](#) that includes hiring incentives of up to \$30,000 for lateral transfers and \$7,500 for new recruits will help with efforts to curb violence.

The ordinance was passed at an Aug. 16 city council meeting. SPD estimates that implementing the measure and offering hiring incentives over the next three years will cost more than \$5 million.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	08/30 Jewelry thieves target elderly western WA
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/jewelry-thieves-targeting-elderly-bellevue-renton-mill-creek-king-snohomish-counties/281-8eb32460-2e6f-4fb3-8cfe-bc07aa4939c1
GIST	<p>MILL CREEK, Wash. — Mill Creek police say at least two elderly people have been targeted for their jewelry in the past two weeks and similar instances have been reported in Bellevue in Renton.</p> <p>The alleged crimes are unusual and appear to catch all the victims off guard.</p> <p>Mark Horner encouraged his mother-in-law to call the police and report what happened.</p> <p>"My mother-in-law is still processing and she's a lovely woman and we're glad that she's OK and we think that she's going to be a little bit, even more wary of people approaching her going forward, sadly," Horner said.</p> <p>Her necklace and ring were just two of the pieces taken by a group of people, including a child, who spotted her out walking and stopped to ask for directions to the nearest church on Monday.</p> <p>Horner said the thieves hugged his mother-in-law, shook her hand and when they were gone so was her jewelry.</p> <p>"The variations in the vehicles, slight variations in the descriptions of the suspects, different ages of the kids that were with them tell us that this was a group and it's an organized, well-rehearsed tactic," Capital Joe Nault of the Bellevue Police Department told KING 5 earlier this month.</p>

	<p>Bellevue police released footage from June of the thieves, possibly the same ones, at work. The department is calling this an organized crime ring they believe is operating up and down the West Coast. They believe the group is using rental cars and to date have hit Bellevue, Renton and Mill Creek.</p> <p>“She’s shaken I think that she’s still misses - obviously - the things that were stolen because they have sentimental value but she’s not physically harmed and that’s a good thing,” Horner said.</p> <p>Law enforcement is warning elderly people especially to be cautious of overly friendly people approaching them while walking.</p> <p>“I think that more than anything the reason I’m speaking out and I have my mother-in-laws permission to do so is that we just want to help give the shout-out to the community to be on the lookout,” Horner continued.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	08/30 ‘Rainbow fentanyl’ in Pacific Northwest
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/pierce-county-rainbow-fentanyl-warning/281-eb1de240-43c4-472f-a931-198df25eef63
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — The Pierce County Sheriff's Office is warning of what is being called "rainbow fentanyl," after it was seized in Multnomah County, Oregon earlier in August.</p> <p>The synthetic opioid dyed various colors could "easily be mistaken for candy," according to the sheriff's office. It comes in two forms, pill and pressed blocks, the latter which "resemble sidewalk chalk that children play with."</p> <p>Deputy Carly Cappetto said the drug can look like Skittles and, "a single piece can be deadly."</p> <p>"Not only are we concerned that children may mistake rainbow fentanyl as candy or a toy, but we're also worried that teenagers may be tempted to try the drug due to its playful coloring," the sheriff's office warned.</p> <p>According to the sheriff's office, parents should keep an eye out for suspicious substances in public spaces, such as parks.</p> <p>On Aug. 4, a 2-year-old boy ingested a fentanyl pill at Tacoma's Oakland Madrona Park. The boy's mother saw him put something in his mouth before he began acting lethargic. First responders administered Narcan and had to perform CPR to stabilize him before taking him to the hospital.</p> <p>The warning from the Pierce County Sheriff's Office came the same day as the Drug Enforcement Administration warned that the brightly-colored fentanyl has made its way to the Pacific Northwest in "an attempt by drug cartels to target teens and young adults."</p> <p>"They're getting smarter, so we need to get smarter with the way we work," Cappetto said.</p> <p>A survey from the University of Washington's Addictions, Drugs and Alcohol Institute revealed a stark increase in the intentional use of the deadly opioid fentanyl across the state.</p> <p>Fentanyl, which took over from methamphetamine in 2020 as the drug most associated with overdoses in Washington state, is being linked to the increase in crime across the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>That trend has resulted in Seattle police seizing nearly 650,000 fentanyl-based pills in 2021. Officers seized 63,000 fentanyl pills in 2020 and less than 200 in 2018.</p>

	<p>Up in Snohomish County, officials have warned of a spike in overdoses and overdose deaths this year. Counterfeit oxycodone pills containing fentanyl and fentanyl in powder and crystal form are largely to blame, followed by methamphetamine.</p> <p>The region sees waves of different drugs on a yearly basis, according to Cappetto. Fentanyl is the latest, and strong than heroin and methamphetamine, Cappetto said.</p> <p>Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report that showed 107,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2021. It marked a 15% increase from the previous record, set in 2020.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Ex-Spokane cop guilty rapes while on duty
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/ex-spokane-police-officer-found-guilty-of-raping-2-women/
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A jury has found a former Spokane, Washington, police officer guilty of raping two women while on duty.</p> <p>After nearly seven days of deliberation, Nathan Nash was found guilty Tuesday of second-degree rape and third-degree rape, KXLY-TV reported.</p> <p>He was found not guilty of another second-degree rape charge, and unlawful imprisonment.</p> <p>Throughout his trial, the 39-year-old maintained his innocence. He was first charged in 2019 when a woman accused him of rape while investigating her case.</p> <p>Nash was one of the responding officers when she reported an assault by her boyfriend. She told law enforcement officers that Nash raped her when he returned to her home to follow up on the case, prosecutors said.</p> <p>In August 2021, another woman told police about a similar experience, saying Nash was one of the officers who responded when she called 911 to report her neighbor had assaulted her. She also said Nash returned to her home to conduct a follow-up and raped her, prosecutors said.</p> <p>In a statement Tuesday, officials with the Spokane Police Department said the agency is grateful that the victims of Nash were afforded some justice while acknowledging nothing can undo the damage caused.</p> <p>“Nathan Nash betrayed the oath he took as a public servant and the trust instilled in him by the citizens of Spokane,” the Spokane Police Statement said. “His actions are inexcusable and today the court, a jury of his peers, held him accountable for his actions.”</p> <p>He was fired from the police department in 2019 after the first allegations.</p> <p>It wasn’t immediately known if he plans to appeal. He faces up to life in prison and is expected to be sentenced later this year.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Oregon Safeway worker hid, fought gunman
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/police-safeway-worker-hid-fought-gunman-with-produce-knife/
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The Safeway employee who was one of two people killed in a Bend, Oregon, supermarket shooting had time to flee but instead hid behind a produce cart and attacked the assailant with a produce knife, an action that likely saved lives, authorities said Tuesday.</p> <p>Surveillance video shows that 66-year-old Donald Ray Surrett Jr., a two-decade U.S. Army veteran, waited in his hiding spot until the gunman looked the other way. Surrett then emerged with the knife that he drew from his hip, police spokeswoman Sheila Miller said.</p>

The gunman, identified as 20-year-old Ethan Blair Miller, on Sunday evening fatally shot Surret and then killed himself as police closed in. Officers found an AR-15-style rifle and a shotgun near his body and police said he had four 30-round magazines for the rifle on his body when he died.

Surveillance video also shows two people going back into the Safeway as the shooting unfolded to pull out the other victim, 84-year-old Glenn Edward Bennett, who had been shot just inside the store's entrance.

"Bend Police are extremely thankful to our community members for the efforts they made during this incident," Miller said.

Authorities continued to collect evidence from the crime scene. More than 100 bullet casings have been recovered so far, police said.

Authorities also confirmed Tuesday that the gunman had worked at the Safeway for a short time in recent years; one high school acquaintance told The Associated Press he saw him gathering up carts in the parking lot in 2020.

The shooter lived in an apartment complex behind The Forum Shopping Center.

He fired shots into his own car on Sunday evening as soon as he left the complex and continued firing as he entered the shopping complex's parking lot and then went into the Safeway. Bennett was killed at the store's entrance, police said, and the shooter then moved through the aisles "spraying shots" from the assault rifle until Surret confronted him.

Police entered the supermarket from the front and rear as shots were still being fired. The entire incident, from the first 911 calls to the gunman's suicide, lasted just four minutes, police have said. In addition to the guns in the store, the shooter had a sawed-off shotgun and three Molotov cocktails in his car, police said.

Fifty shotgun shells total were found between his car and apartment and 150 additional rounds of ammunition were in his apartment.

All the guns were purchased legally, authorities said. Police have previously said the gunman had no criminal history and police had not been contacted about him prior to the shooting.

After the shooting, acquaintances recalled the gunman as a loner who was passionate about mixed martial arts and was known for getting into fights at the high school where he graduated in 2020.

Police have previously said they are also investigating the "shooter's writings" but have declined to comment further on postings on several online platforms that appear to have been written by him in recent months.

In posts on several sites, someone who appears to be the gunman says he's struggled to recover from the isolation and loneliness of the pandemic, expresses hatred for himself and indicates he planned to attack his alma mater next week, but couldn't wait until then because "the Rage has become uncontrollable."

Authorities sought a search warrant for digital devices found at the gunman's apartment and it will take several days to go through those materials and develop a clearer picture, said Police Chief Mike Krantz.

"A lot of people sent us follow-up information about what has been posted on social media or other outlets and our investigators will sift through that information and make those connections — if it's truly connected— and ensure that we have accurate information," he said.

About 150 people gathered in a Bend park on Monday night for a vigil to remember the victims. A church choir sang and a pastor and city officials spoke as people laid flowers.

	<p>Craig Van Bruggen attended the vigil and told Oregon Public Broadcasting that he was in the Safeway on the phone with his wife when the shooting began. He believes Surret's actions helped him escape without injury.</p> <p>"Sounds like Donald potentially slowed down the shooter enough to save some lives, and he's a hero," Van Bruggen said.</p> <p>Debora Jean Surret, the ex-wife of the Safeway employee killed in the attack, told AP in a phone interview that Surret served in the Army for 20 years as a combat engineer. He wasn't deployed to active combat zones, but during the 20 years they were married from 1975 to 1995, they were stationed in Germany three times and lived on military bases across the U.S.</p> <p>The shooter graduated from Mountain View High School in Bend in 2020, according to online records, and classmate Isaac Thomas remembered him as an extremely combative person who had few friends.</p> <p>Thomas said he was suspended for a week as a freshman for fighting with the gunman. The gunman held onto a grudge from that fight and once threatened to shoot him, Thomas told AP.</p> <p>"At one point he said he was going to shoot me and I was like, 'Get over yourself' because I didn't think he had a gun, but I guess I was wrong," Thomas said.</p> <p>Thomas recalled running into the shooter in 2020 in the parking lot of the Safeway, where the gunman was gathering up carts as part of his job. He recognized him and threatened him again although several years had gone by, Thomas said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Separate child kidnap attempts in Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/two-men-arrested-in-separate-child-kidnap-attempts-in-seattle/
GIST	<p>Seattle police arrested two men in separate child kidnapping attempts a few hours apart on Tuesday, authorities said.</p> <p>At 11 a.m., a man allegedly tried to force a 10-year-old girl he did not know into a car in the 6500 block of 45th Avenue Northeast in the View Ridge neighborhood, the Seattle Police Department said in a blotter item.</p> <p>A witness intervened and the man fled, leaving the child behind, police said. Officers found his car in Fremont, arrested him and booked him into the King County Jail.</p> <p>Police are still investigating the incident.</p> <p>Shortly before 1 p.m., a 45-year-old man grabbed a 7-year-old boy who was walking with his grandmother on Second Avenue, lifting him off his feet, police said.</p> <p>The boy's grandmother held onto him as a passerby helped fend off the man. Police found the man, who appeared to be in crisis, several blocks away and booked him into the King County Jail.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	08/30 Fentanyl: 2 Mexico cartels dominate supply
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mexico-drug-cartels-fentanyl-overdose-sinaloa-jalisco-11661866903?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	CULIACÁN, Mexico—At a half-built house in a barrio, a longtime Sinaloa cartel employee used a shovel to mix chemicals in a simmering oil barrel.

His concoction was an [illegal form of fentanyl](#), which Mexican criminal organizations are churning out at high volume in laboratories and smuggling across the border. In a six-day workweek, the cook said, he can make enough fentanyl for hundreds of thousands of doses.

With business savvy and growing power in Mexico, the Sinaloa and [rival Jalisco cartels](#) dominate the market for [supplying fentanyl to the U.S.](#) They cornered the market after China cracked down on fentanyl production several years ago and are now churning out bootleg versions of the highly potent synthetic opioid that, in its legal form, is used under prescription to treat severe pain.

Fentanyl's inexpensive, easy-to-replicate formula has boosted its appeal to criminal networks. It is also [fueling an overdose crisis](#) that claimed more than 108,000 lives in the U.S. last year, a record.

"If it were an athlete, people would call it 'The G.O.A.T.," said Jim Crotty, who served as deputy chief of staff at the Drug Enforcement Administration from 2019 to 2021. "It is in fact the most pernicious, the most devastating drug that we have ever seen."

Like a factory worker at [a multinational corporation](#), the 25-year-old fentanyl cook is part of a globe-spanning production line manufacturing the cartels' highly profitable export. These crude labs—it is unknown how many there are—can be set up inexpensively and quickly, torn down and moved or abandoned to evade security forces.

The cook said he makes up to \$2,500 a week running his one-man lab, where he dons a hazmat suit, dark glasses and a black cloth mask. If he gets queasy, he said, he drinks milk. Jugs line the roughly 10-by-10 foot lab, including one containing a clear liquid marked "Pure Acetone." Others are marked "Fentanyl XXX," and "Chinese Chemical."

The two cartels are named for their respective strongholds in states on Mexico's Pacific Coast. Sinaloa is a decades-old criminal organization [deeply embedded in the economy, politics and culture of Mexico's wild northwest](#), analysts and officials said. Jalisco, farther south, is a relative upstart, and has violently challenged Sinaloa for market share.

Fentanyl production is simpler than heroin, because it is entirely synthetic and doesn't require cultivating the poppies needed for heroin. Busts of Mexican labs or large seizures at the border can be quickly offset by new batches without having to wait to harvest crops or pay farmers.

It is also less expensive to make. The plant-based opium needed to produce a kilogram of heroin can cost producers about \$6,000, while the precursor chemicals to make a kilogram of fentanyl cost \$200 or less, according to Bryce Pardo, associate director of the Rand Corp.'s Drug Policy Research Center, who helped lead a recent bipartisan report on synthetic opioids.

"Synthetic opioids offer economic and tactical advantages that allow criminals to vastly outpace enforcement efforts," the report said. Illegal drug exports to the U.S. from Mexico are worth tens of billions of dollars annually, it estimates, with fentanyl a growing share of the business.

Heroin's profile has been shrinking as fentanyl becomes more available. Some Mexican poppy farmers in the mountains of Sinaloa say they have lost income as cartels shift away from heroin, and have abandoned their fields.

'Principal product'

The Sinaloa cartel is the market leader, said Renato Sales, Mexico's former security chief. U.S. and Mexican officials likened it to how a company works, manufacturing and marketing an array of illegal drugs and cultivating links to suppliers in dozens of countries in Latin America, Europe and Asia. The cartel is believed to have different units handling jobs such as security, money laundering, transportation, production and the bribing of public officials.

The [cartel dominates the economy and life of Culiacán](#), a semitropical city of luxury cars, gated neighborhoods and barrios. The downtown includes a shrine to Jesús Malverde, a bandit whom many of Sinaloa's drug traffickers have adopted as a popular saint. A cemetery housing air-conditioned tombs three stories tall is a hallowed resting place for prominent drug lords, and their not-so prominent hit men, some of whose plots are bought in bulk by their bosses.

At the city's airport gift shop, visitors can buy baseball caps emblazoned with the number 701, a reference to the ranking in the 2009 Forbes list of richest people of [Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman](#), the drug lord and Sinaloa native son serving a life sentence in a supermax prison in Colorado.

The U.S. attorney's office in San Diego in June said 26 people were indicted following a two-year investigation into what law-enforcement officials described as a sprawling operation extending from Sinaloa. Drugs seized included methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin and nearly 500,000 fake pills laced with fentanyl, investigators said. The DEA identified alleged couriers, stash-house managers and people who smuggled proceeds back to Mexico.

A separate DEA operation in 2020 led to the arrest of more than 600 alleged Jalisco cartel members in the U.S. That cartel is Mexico's fastest-growing and most violent. It is fighting with Sinaloa for control of seaports where fentanyl's chemical ingredients arrive from China as well as routes through the country and border crossings into the U.S.

Illegal fentanyl production has flared in the past. A 2005 fentanyl surge in parts of the U.S., including the Midwest, led authorities to a single illegal lab in the city of Toluca, near Mexico City. Shutting it down helped stem the problem for a time.

[Fentanyl metastasized into a broader crisis in the 2010s](#), as drugs flowed from China, sometimes through Mexico, and the cartels ramped up their own production. The eastern half of the U.S. was particularly hard-hit as powdered fentanyl was mixed into the heroin supply, sometimes catching users off guard and [leading to an increase in fatal overdoses](#).

In May 2019, under pressure from the U.S., China put fentanyl-related drugs under a controlled regulatory regime. The next year, seizures of fentanyl from China in the U.S. dropped sharply, according to a Government Accountability Office report.

"As we all know, China is not a democracy," said Jim Carroll, U.S. drug czar under former President [Donald Trump](#). "They can take very quick adverse action against these producers." Chinese chemical manufacturers continue to sell the ingredients for fentanyl, many of which have a range of legitimate uses.

Marketing savvy

Mexican cartels were primed to take advantage. They already had established trafficking networks built around drugs like cocaine, marijuana and heroin, said Uttam Dhillon, who served as acting DEA administrator under Mr. Trump. And they had relationships with Chinese chemical makers, and expertise running drugmaking labs, through their production of methamphetamine, another synthetic drug they are sending to the U.S., Mr. Dhillon said.

The DEA said the cartels are pushing their synthetic wares into more parts of the U.S. Methamphetamine is more present in some eastern states where that drug was once rare. And fentanyl is growing in the West. Its potency and the lack of quality control in the black market make it easy to cause overdoses—including when users don't know that fentanyl is laced into or simply sold as other drugs.

The drug often arrives [in the form of fake tablets](#) made to look like prescription drugs, including pain pills, law-enforcement authorities said. The DEA believes these dupes—often stamped to look like real 30 milligram oxycodone pills—are aimed at driving prescription drug users toward an illicit, cartel-made product.

The cartels “don’t just fill a void, they create a market,” Mr. Dhillon said.

The pills are so ubiquitous that they have been falling in price, creating pressure on the cartels to roll out new products, according to a 27-year-old fentanyl producer who runs a clandestine lab in Culiacán. He said he and a partner are experimenting with a new version meant to be 30% more potent than the typical fake oxycodone tablets, known as M30s.

The new pills, colored pink, yellow and green, have the shape of a skull, an iconic Mexican folkloric image, and don’t try to mimic real medication. They are also made with butter flavoring so that, when melted on foil with a flame, the pills leave a golden trail and smell like caramel popcorn, telltale signs of quality, said the producer.

He said he has made as many as one million pills in a week. Another worker in his lab had to periodically stop one of their machines—a \$4,000, Chinese-made pill press—to clear jams as it ran on a recent, humid day.

“The M30 is not working very well. Everybody is making them,” the producer said. The new pill, he said, “will generate a lot of demand.”

Common chemicals

Fentanyl market dynamics have proven hard to disrupt. One problem is that many of the precursor chemicals made in China are also used in legitimate pharmaceuticals. Even when some are controlled, fentanyl makers can pick different inputs among an array of available chemicals, the recent U.S. bipartisan report said.

Take the chemical 4-piperidone, which is a common fentanyl component that is also used for legitimate pharmaceutical research.

Some 160,000 companies in China produce chemicals used in drug assembly in batches as small as tens of metric tons, the State Department estimated in early 2021, although estimates vary widely.

Rahul Gupta, director of the Biden White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the U.S. is asking China to enforce proper labeling of chemical shipments and to agree on which regulated chemicals can be used to make fentanyl so they can be tracked.

A 2021 report from two researchers at the Institute of Criminal Investigation of People’s Public Security University of China, the country’s highest police academy, pointed to weak training and unclear lines of command within China’s drug enforcement divisions. The researchers said those inspecting chemical plants often don’t have the means or know-how to identify fentanyl precursor chemicals.

The U.S. wants China to apply what are known as “know your customer procedures” to chemical makers so that manufacturers are accountable for where their products go, Dr. Gupta said.

China disputes the U.S. characterization of China’s role in the illicit fentanyl supply chain. A statement from the Chinese embassy in Washington, D.C., touted China’s efforts to control drug precursors and said it was untrue that these chemicals undergird the U.S. fentanyl problem. “The U.S. has itself to blame for the root cause of fentanyl abuse in the country,” it said.

A stiffer Chinese crackdown on precursors might not disrupt the market or slow the cartels because they could buy chemicals from other countries, including India. “There’s lots of places these same chemicals can come from,” said Rep. David Trone (D., Md.), who co-chairs a federal commission on synthetic opioid trafficking, which is behind this year’s bipartisan report, during a recent conference.

To try to stop fentanyl precursors from entering Mexico from Asia, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador put the country’s ports and its largest airport in Mexico City [under the control of the Mexican navy](#).

The navy said in June it had seized around 320 tons of illicit-drug chemicals in the past six months. Mexican authorities have also destroyed about 1,000 labs, 90% of them in Sinaloa producing synthetic drugs, mostly methamphetamine, in the 3½ years since Mr. López Obrador took office, a senior Mexican navy officer said.

Since 2017, Mexico has dismantled some 22 fentanyl production sites, said Oscar Santiago Quintos, head of the criminal intelligence agency of the attorney general's office. In a bust in July, Mexican soldiers captured 543 kilos of what they said was fentanyl, the single largest seizure in Mexican history.

U.S. seizures last year included 20.4 million fake pills, according to the DEA. Fentanyl and other drugs are often ferried across the southern border hidden in secret compartments of vehicles.

U.S. officials and analysts in both countries have criticized Mr. López Obrador for failing to curb the cartels' growing power. The Mexican president has said he is focused on what he calls the economic roots of Mexico's lawlessness and violence, rather than dismantling the cartels.

Cross-border cooperation over security matters has been strained since U.S. agents [arrested a former Mexican defense minister](#) on drug conspiracy charges in 2020. The U.S. dropped charges after Mexico threatened to curtail cooperation. Mexico passed legislation that U.S. officials said [made it harder to work with their Mexican counterparts](#).

The Sinaloa cartel was forged from close-knit families in the mountains near Culiacán, who for generations grew marijuana and the opium poppies that provided the base for heroin. Alliances with Colombian cartels in the 1980s ramped up Sinaloa's control of the flow of cocaine on routes to the U.S. In Culiacán, the cartel runs what amounts to a shadow government in a company town.

The fentanyl cook started with the cartel as a 14-year-old lookout. He measured by eye while cooking the fentanyl, holding two fingers against a bottle marked "chlorine" before pouring some into the oil-barrel mix. "We have our own formula," he said. His efforts yielded a grayish-white, dough-like paste, which would be dried in the sun and packed as kilograms of powder for shipment across the border.

As he worked, an associate whispered that a car was coming to pick up cargo from the next room. Wrapped in plastic, the 16 kilograms, which represent about three days work, were marked with different codes—X30, Coco, PO8—identifying buyers. Each kilo could potentially yield tens of thousands of doses. "They are leaving tonight for the U.S.," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in

Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: [≤http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml)

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)